











THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF VAISNAVISM  
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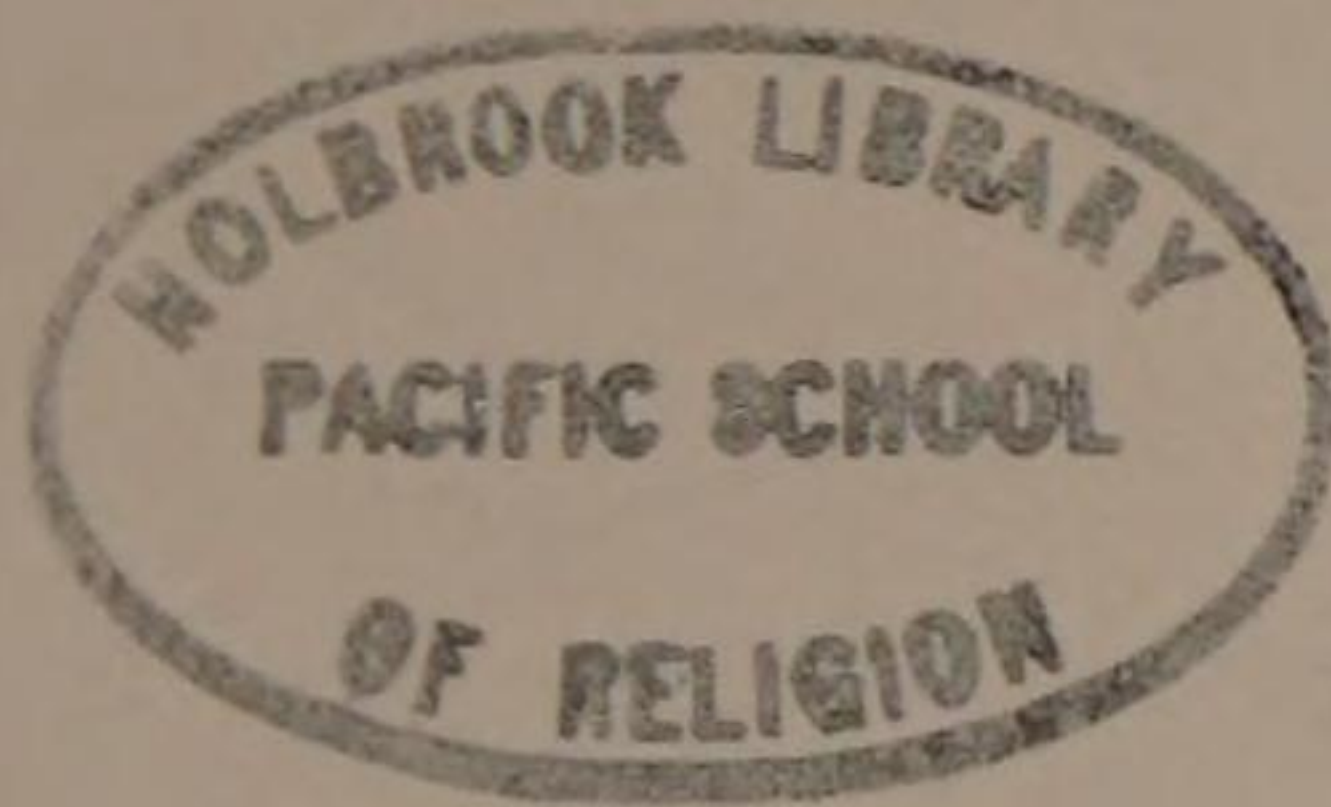






# THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF VAISNAVISM

(VAISNAVISM FROM 200 B.C. TO A.D. 500)



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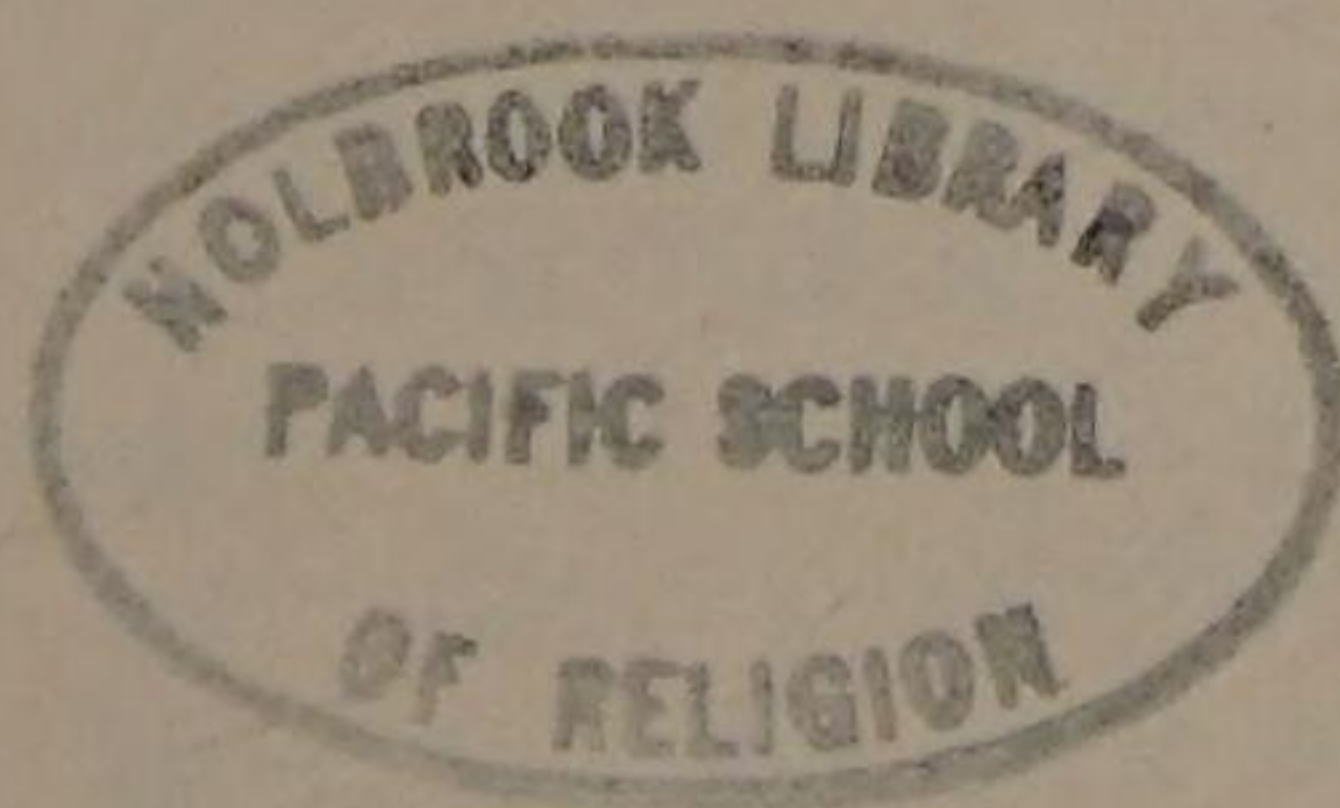
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**TO**  
**PROFESSOR RAM SHARAN SHARMA**





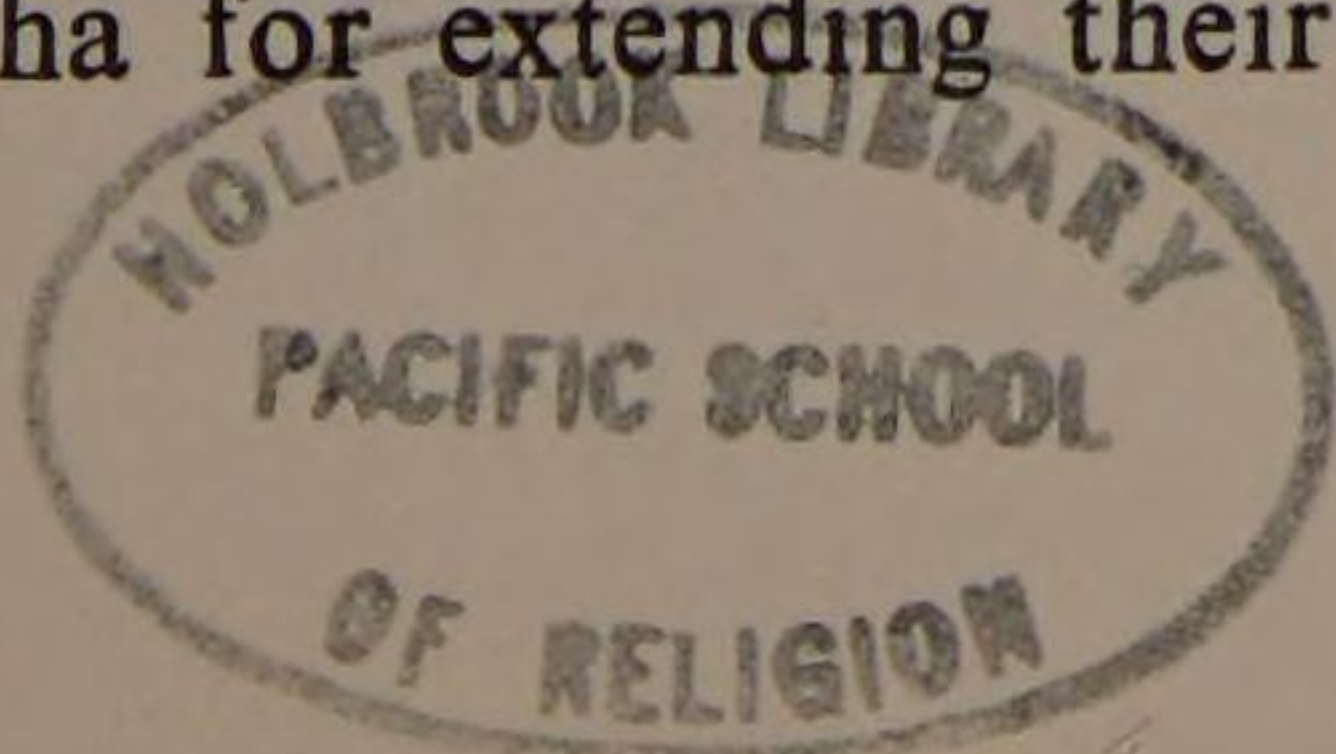




## PREFACE

The scope of the work is limited to the history of Vaiṣṇavism in post-Maurya and Gupta periods, although I had to go back often to earlier times to explain the rise of certain cults, rituals and doctrines in the period under study. It largely embodies my thesis approved for the degree of Ph.D. at the Patna University in 1963. It was sent to press early in 1964; but due to the non-availability of certain diacritical marks in the press, the publication was much delayed, and even then the sign *m* could not be printed properly in most cases. I crave the indulgence of my readers on this score.

I want to express my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Ram Sharan Sharma, Head of the Department of History, Patna University, who has supervised my work. His inspiring interest and exacting standards of scholarship have gone a long way to make the work what it is. I am also under obligation to Dr. Yogendra Misra, who guided me during the absence of Professor Sharma in England and gave me sound advice on several technical matters. My examiners Professors. A. L. Basham and D. C. Sircar offered me some very helpful criticisms and suggestions; to them my most sincere thanks are due. I am deeply beholden to late Professor D.D. Kosambi, who during his last visit to Patna in 1964, found time to look through the typescript and gave me valuable advice. It is a matter of deep regret to me that the book could not come out during his lifetime. I am obliged to Professor Tan Yun-Shan, Director, Visva-Bharati, Cheena Bhavana, Santiniketan, for sending me a copy of a relevant passage found in the Chinese Tripitaka along with its English rendering. I also wish to thank Dr. Mrs. Vina Mazumdar, my erstwhile colleague and now Education Officer, University Grants Commission, for her keen interest in my work. My discussions with her have been stimulating and thought-provoking. I have also the pleasure of expressing my special thanks to Sri S.M. Karimi, Reader, Department of Geography, Patna University, for preparing the map and to Sri Radha Krishna Chaudhuri, Dr. Bambahadur Mishra and Dr. Dvijendra Narayan Jha for extending their help to me in various ways.





For financial assistance, I am grateful to Dr. G. Jacob, the then Vice-Chancellor of Patna University, for granting me a sum of Rs. 1000.00 to meet a part of the expenses involved.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Sri B. P. Jaiswal, for his constant encouragement and co-operation without which it would have been impossible for me to accomplish the task.

Patna,

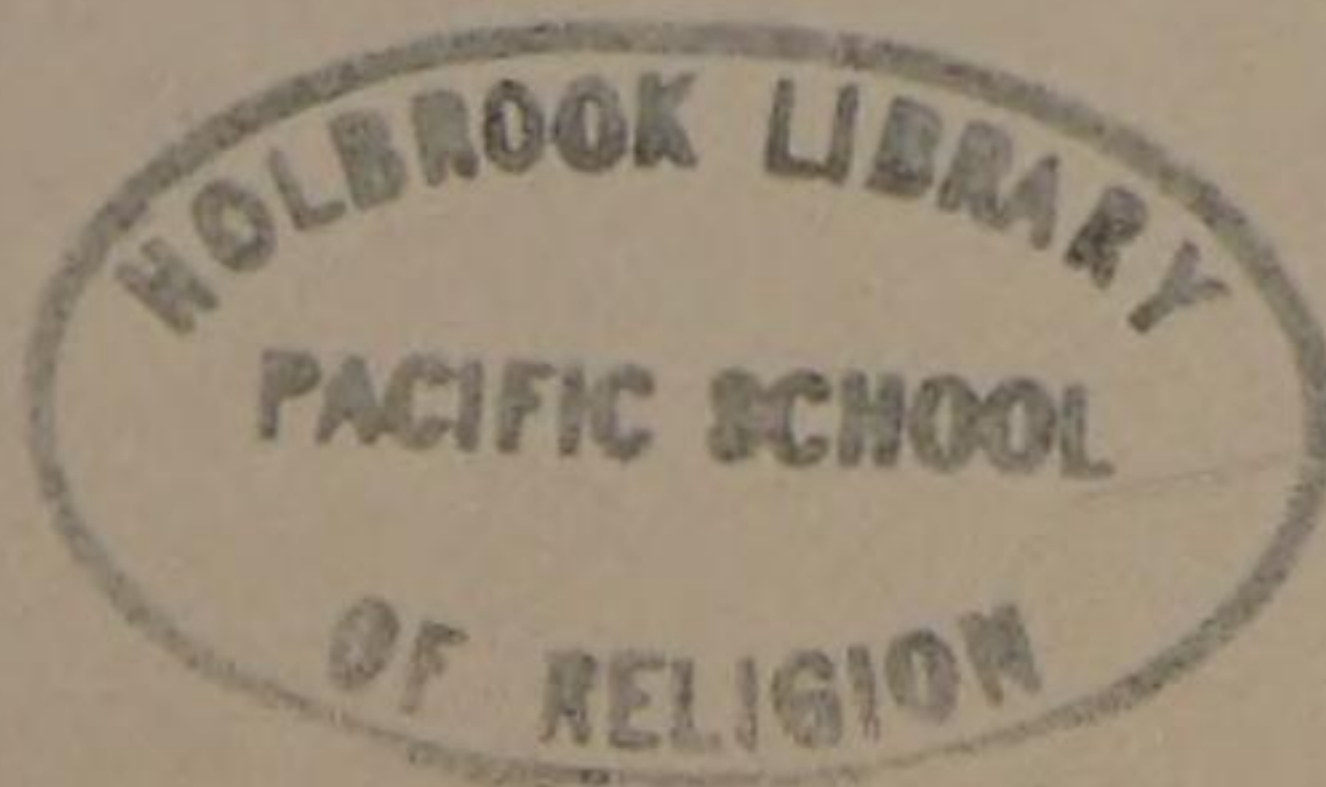
September 1967

SUVIRA JAISWAL



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## ROMAN EQUIVALENTS OF NAGARI LETTERS

अ	a	आ	ā	इ	i	ई	ī
उ	u	ऊ	ū	ए	e	ऐ	ai
ओ	o	औ	au	ऋ	ṛ		

क्	k	ख्	kh	ग्	g	घ्	gh	ङ्	ṅ
च्	c	छ्	ch	ज्	j	झ्	jh	ञ्	ñ
ट्	ṭ	ठ्	ṭh	ड्	ḍ	ढ्	ḍh	ण्	ṇ
त्	t	थ्	th	द्व	d	ध्व	dh	न्	n
प्	p	फ्	ph	ब्	b	भ्व	bh	म्	m
य्	y	र	r	ल्	l	व्	v	श्	ś

ष्    ṣ                      Anusvāra    ँ    ṁ

स्    s                      Visarga    :    ḥ

ह    h







## ABBREVIATIONS

ABORI	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.</i>
AEV	<i>Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism.</i>
<i>Agni. Pu.</i>	<i>Agni Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Ahir. Sam.</i>	<i>Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā.</i>
AIU	<i>The Age of Imperial Unity. (History and Culture of the Indian People. Vol. II).</i>
<i>Anc. Ind.</i>	<i>Ancient India.</i>
<i>Aś.</i>	<i>Arthaśāstra.</i>
ASIAR	<i>Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Reports.</i>
ASR	<i>Archaeological Survey of India, Reports by Sir Alexander Cunningham.</i>
<i>Baudh. Gr. Sū.</i>	<i>Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra.</i>
<i>Baudh. Gr. Śsū.</i>	<i>Baudhāyana Gṛhya Śeṣasūtra.</i>
<i>Bhā. Pu.</i>	<i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Bhg.</i>	<i>Bhagavadgītā.</i>
<i>Bibl. Ind.</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Indica.</i>
BMCCAI	<i>Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India in the British Museum.</i>
<i>Brahmāṇḍa Pu.</i>	<i>Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Br. Sam.</i>	<i>Bṛhat Saṃhitā of Varāhamihira.</i>
BSOS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.</i>
<i>Cat. Āndhra Etc.</i>	<i>Catalogue of the Coins of the Āndhra Dynasty, the Western Kṣatrapas, the Traikūṭaka Dynasty and the Bodhi Dynasty.</i>
<i>Cat. Br. Im. Math. Art.</i>	<i>A Catalogue of the Brāhmaṇical Images in Mathura Art.</i>
<i>Cat. Gupta Coins</i>	<i>Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasty and of Śaśāṅka king Gauḍa.</i>
CII	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.</i>
<i>Cul. Her. Ind.</i>	<i>Cultural Heritage of India.</i>
Ed.	Editor, edition.
EHVS	<i>Materials for the Study of Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Sect.</i>



EI	<i>Epigraphica Indica.</i>
<i>Ep. Mytho.</i>	<i>Epic Mythology.</i>
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.</i>
GOS	<i>Gaikwad Oriental Series.</i>
<i>Hariv.</i>	<i>Harivamśa.</i>
HIIA	<i>History of Indian and Indonesian Art.</i>
HIL	<i>History of Indian Literature.</i>
<i>Hind. Budd.</i>	<i>Hinduism and Buddhism.</i>
<i>Hist. Dh.</i>	<i>History of Dharmaśāstra.</i>
HSL	<i>History of Sanskrit Literature.</i>
IA	<i>Indian Antiquary, Bombay.</i>
IHQ	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly.</i>
<i>Ind. Arch.</i>	<i>Indian Archaeology, A Review.</i>
Intro.	<i>Introduction.</i>
<i>Intro. Pañca.</i>	<i>Introduction to Pañcarātra.</i>
Ins.	<i>Inscription.</i>
ISIH	<i>Introduction to the Study of Indian History.</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society.</i>
JASB	<i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.</i>
<i>Jayā. Sam.</i>	<i>Jayākhyā Samhitā.</i>
JBBRAS	<i>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
JBORS	<i>Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society.</i>
JBRS	<i>Journal of Bihar Research Society.</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient.</i>
<i>J. Ind. Hist.</i>	<i>Journal of Indian History.</i>
JISOA	<i>Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.</i>
JNSI	<i>Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.</i>
JRASB	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.</i>
JUPHS	<i>Journal of the U.P. Historical Society.</i>
Lüders' List.	<i>Lüders' List of Inscriptions published in Epigraphia Indica, Appendix. X</i>
<i>Mahā.</i>	<i>Mahābhāṣya.</i>
<i>Mānava Gr. Sū.</i>	<i>Mānava Gr̥hya Sūtra.</i>



<i>Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.</i>	<i>Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.</i>
MASI	<i>Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.</i>
<i>Mat. Pu.</i>	<i>Matsya Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Mbh.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata.</i>
<i>Mbh. (vul)</i>	<i>Mahābhārata (vulgate).</i>
<i>Msm.</i>	<i>Manu-smṛti.</i>
MW	Monier Monier-Williams.
N.S.	New Series.
Pā.	Pāṇini.
<i>Para. Saṃ.</i>	<i>Parama Saṃhitā.</i>
Pat.	Patañjali.
<i>Political Ideas etc.</i>	<i>Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India.</i>
PHAI	<i>Political History of Ancient India.</i>
<i>Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.</i>	<i>Proceedings of Indian History Congress.</i>
<i>Pu. Rec.</i>	<i>Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs.</i>
<i>Rāmā.</i>	<i>Rāmāyaṇa.</i>
<i>Rel. Phil. Ved.</i>	<i>Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas.</i>
RV	<i>Ṛgveda.</i>
<i>Śat. Br.</i>	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.</i>
SBE	<i>Sacred Books of the East, Oxford.</i>
SED	<i>Sanskrit-English Dictionary.</i>
<i>Sel. Ins.</i>	<i>Select Inscriptions, Vol. I.</i>
<i>St. Geog. Anc. Med. Ind.</i>	<i>Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India.</i>
<i>St. Up.</i>	<i>Studies in the Upa-purāṇas, Vol. I.</i>
<i>Śū. Anc. Ind.</i>	<i>Śūdras in Ancient India.</i>
<i>Tai. Ār.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka.</i>
<i>Tai. Br.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.</i>
TPU	<i>Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads ed. by Hume.</i>
Tr.	Translation, translator.
<i>Vā. Pu.</i>	<i>Vāyu Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Vai. Sm. Sū.</i>	<i>Vaikhānasa Smārta Sūtra.</i>
<i>Vi. Pu.</i>	<i>Viṣṇu Purāṇa</i>
<i>Viṣṇudh.</i>	<i>Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.</i>
VSMRS	<i>Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and minor religious Sects.</i>







## INTRODUCTION

SPEAKING BEFORE the University of Oxford in 1840 Horace Hayman Wilson, one of the pioneers of Indology, emphasised the necessity of studying Hindu religions in order to prove their erroneousness and to persuade the Hindu intelligentsia to adopt the Christian faith. He expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the University had accepted the proposal of the then Bishop of Calcutta “to contribute to the religious enlightenment of a benighted, but intelligent and interesting and amiable people”,<sup>1</sup> and pointed out that “to confute the falsities of Hinduism, and affirm to the conviction of a reasonable Hindu the truths of Christianity”,<sup>2</sup> it was obligatory that one should know the doctrines and beliefs of the Hindus, for a Hindu would not listen to one who argued with them without knowing their scriptures. Wilson stated<sup>3</sup> that although the Hindu claimed his religion to be eternal and “revealed”, there were definite indications that Hinduism had undergone considerable changes in its content and outward manifestations during the long period of its existence ; and therefore the beginnings of a historical study of Hindu cults were made with a view to help those who carried the white man’s sacred burden of extending the truths of Christianity from one end of the earth to the other. Wilson made a detailed study of the Purāṇas and translated the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* into English to make easily accessible to the Western public the authentic sacred writings of the Hindus.<sup>4</sup>

1. Wilson, *Essays and Lectures chiefly on the Religion of the Hindus*, Vol. II, p. 40.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

4. Wilson in the preface to his translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, p. i.



vehemently refuted the arguments of those who held that the *bhakti* cult of Kṛṣṇa owed something to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> His arguments have won general approval, and now it is generally conceded that the myths and doctrines of the cult of Kṛṣṇa do not show any traces of Christian influence in the early centuries of the Christian era. But, Raychaudhuri's reconstruction of the life of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa does not account for the multiformity in his character,<sup>2</sup> and his attempt to connect the *bhakti* cult with the Sun-worship is not successful.<sup>3</sup>

The application of western methods of critical studies to Indian religions did not commend itself to some Indian scholars, who wished to stress the "spiritual" side of these religions, and one scholar complained<sup>4</sup> that those who wrote religious history paid attention to the outer elements only, "and not to *sādhana* which forms their essence". He argued that the scholars did not have an insight into the spiritual culture and consequently did not believe in these religions ; so their accounts presented a wrong view.<sup>5</sup> He further contended that many western scholars tried to prove as far as possible the comparatively later date of our civilisation, and that they picked up the pen "with a questionable motive to cast doubts upon facts which constitute an object of pride to the Indians".<sup>6</sup>

However, there were many western orientalists who expressed deep appreciation of Indian religious thought and philosophy, and were liberal in their outlook. In 1922, L. D. Barnett wrote *The Hindu Gods and Heroes*, which was published in *The Wisdom of the East Series*, and as the editors remarked, the purpose of the series was to encourage goodwill between the East and the West.<sup>7</sup> The treatment of Vaiṣṇavite divinities in this book is, by nature of the work, short but sympathetic. An important work of this period is Sir Charles Eliot's *Hinduism and Buddhism* published in three volumes (1921). The scope of this book is very wide, hence the account of early Vaiṣṇavism is necessarily sketchy. The introduction

1. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, pp. 128-60.

2. *Infra*, p. 87f.

3. For a refutation of Raychaudhuri's Thesis see, S.K. De, *Bhāgavatism and Sun-worship*, BSOS, VI, pp. 669-72,

4. N. N. Law, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, 1925, pp. 157-9.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

7. The Editorial note by L. Crammer Byng and S. A. Kapadia in Barnetts' *The Hindu Gods and Heroes*.



to Hill's English translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (1928) also contains a short account of the cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, but the doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā* are treated in great detail. The poem has deeply fascinated the western as well as the Indian mind; and the scholars were often tempted to investigate into the origins of the ideas and doctrines propounded in it. Important contributions in the field were made by Garbe<sup>1</sup> and Telang<sup>2</sup> in the introductory essays to their translations of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the early years of the present century. The Pañcarātra works, however, have not received the same amount of attention; and F. O. Schrader's *Introduction to the Pañcarātra and the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā* published in 1916, is the first pioneer work containing much useful information about this branch of Vaiṣṇava literature.

Of some notable articles related to the subject, we may mention Coomaraswamy's essay (1929) on Śrī-Lakṣmī throwing some light on her original character and iconography.<sup>3</sup> A short treatise appearing serially in the volumes of the *Indian Historical Quarterly* in 1931 and 1932 discussed some features of the early worship of Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after, a lengthy article analysing the incarnations of Viṣṇu by collating material from the epics and the Purāṇas was published in a volume of the *Allahabad University Studies*.<sup>5</sup> The problems of the Kṛṣṇa legend formed the subject matter of another article, which compared critically the accounts given in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas.<sup>6</sup> J. N. Banerjea contributed an article on the iconography of the Hindu gods in which he discussed some vyūha and incarnatory forms of Viṣṇu.<sup>7</sup> D. D. Kosambi in an article in 1948-9 indicated the possible sources of the *Bhagavadgītā* and commented upon the syncretism effected through the doctrine of

1. Garbe's Intro. to the *Bhg.* translated by Utgikar, IA, 1918, App. pp. 1-33.

2. *See*, VIII, II ed., 1908.

3. Coomaraswamy, *Eastern Art*, I, pp. 175-89.

4. Mrinal Dasgupta, 'Early Viṣṇuism and Nārāyaṇīya Worship' IHQ, VII, pp. 93-116, 343-58, 733-679, VIII, pp. 64-84.

5. S. L. Katre, *Allahabad University Studies*, X, pp. 37-130.

6. Tadpatrikar, ABORI, X, pp. 269-344.

7. Banerjea, 'Hindu Iconography' JISOA, XIII, 1945, pp. 55-129, XIV, 1946, pp. 1-75.



incarnations.<sup>1</sup> In a recent study (1961) he has discussed<sup>2</sup> the social and economic background of the *Bhagavadgītā* and analysed the social functions of the *bhakti*.

A few years back J. Gonda wrote a monograph<sup>3</sup> discussing some features of the early worship of Viṣṇu. It contains much useful material, and sheds welcome light on Viṣṇu's connections with fertility and his relations with Indra, and the character of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, but his complete disregard of chronological considerations<sup>4</sup> makes him attribute to the god features which he acquired much later only through amalgamation with various divinities. Gonda makes no attempt to disentangle the personalities of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, and treats the evidence of Vedic literature and of the epics and the Purāṇas in the same vein without paying any attention to the fact that Viṣṇu's character is radically transformed in the epic-Purāṇa complex. A booklet<sup>5</sup> published in 1956 relates the progress of Vaiṣṇavism from the advent of the Śuṅgas to the end of the Gupta rule as gleaned from archaeological sources, but the account is not exhaustive and even some important Vaiṣṇavite epigraphs seem to have been overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

In the present work an endeavour is made to make full use of the hitherto untapped literary and archaeological sources, including some Jain and Buddhist works which have provided valuable material. The critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* has rendered the evidence of the epic much more trustworthy and authoritative, and a greater reliance could be placed on the material drawn from it than what the earlier historians could afford. A thorough utilisation of the numismatic, glyptic and epigraphic evidence together with that derived from literary sources has enabled to trace the regional extent and popularity of Vaiṣṇavism in much greater detail. Besides, greater attention is paid to those Vaiṣṇavite divinities who have not till now attracted much attention. The doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism are analysed, and, wherever possible, the causes of their rise and general

1. Kosambi, *The Avatāra Syncretism and possible Sources of the Bhagavadgītā*, JBBRAS, XXIV-XXV, pp. 121-34.

2. Kosambi, JESHO, IV, ii, pp. 198-224.

3. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Utrecht, 1954.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

5. K. G. Goswami, *A Study of Vaiṣṇavism*, Calcutta, 1956.

6. For example, the evidence of the Tuśām rock ins. (CII, III. No. 67), which mentions a Sāttvata worshipper of Viṣṇu, is not discussed.



acceptance explained. Vaiṣṇavite rites and practices, which had hardly received any attention so far, are especially noted and examined, for they often help in determining the social and original character of a cult.

The present study is undertaken neither with a view to show the "falsities" of Vaiṣṇavism nor in the spirit of belief in the "spirituality" and "inner meaning" of the religion. An attempt is made to study in a dispassionate manner the development and progress of Vaiṣṇavism in the context of its social basis, for it should be readily conceded that "the religion of a community is not something unrelated to its secular activities any more than the religious experience of an individual is apart from his general mental development".<sup>1</sup>

1. Margaretta Morris, JAOS, XXIV, ii, pp. 394-5.



## SOURCES

A STUDY of Vaiṣṇavism in post-Maurya and Gupta times must take into account both the literary and the archaeological records of the period. Whereas the literature of this period gives information about the mythology, teachings and rituals of the Vaiṣṇavas, the archaeological sources indicate how far these were prevalent among the people. A proper collation of all available source-material is all the more necessary in face of the great uncertainty that prevails with regard to the specific dates of most literary works generally assigned to this period, which covers nearly seven hundred years; hence the evidence, derived from epigraphs, coins, seals and similar other antiquities, is of invaluable help in evaluating and often supplementing our knowledge.

Our literary sources are mainly scriptural dealing with the myths and legends of Vaiṣṇavite divinities, and a historical study of these enables us, to some extent, to trace the origin and evolution of a particular myth or legend, which may throw some light on the progress of the cult, and occasionally reveal the basis of the myth over which the super-structure was raised. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which originated as popular poems relating heroic tales of legendary figures, are now, in their present form, among the chief repositories of Vaiṣṇavite myths and teachings, and have come to acquire a religious sanctity. Of the latter, it is generally held, that the first and the last books are later additions. The original work, consisting of books II to VI, with the exception of some interpolated



passages, was composed by some poet who wrote perhaps in the third century B.C., when it was still Indra and not Viṣṇu who held the highest place in brāhmaṇical theology. It described Rāma simply as a human being and not as an incarnation of Viṣṇu; his deification and identification with Viṣṇu are later propositions set forth in the added portions only, and scholars are of opinion that these were interpolated into the *Rāmāyaṇa* towards the end of the second century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

The other epic, the *Mahābhārata*, is of vital importance for the history of Vaiṣṇavism, for it is the earliest work indicating the rise of devotional cults and giving a sectarian account of the Vaiṣṇavite divinities, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu. Recent researches<sup>2</sup> have revealed that the great epic of India is not a patchwork, or a motley assortment of heterogeneous material piled at one place, and turned into a "literary monster", by "unpoetical theologians and commentators and clumsy copyists",<sup>3</sup> but a harmonious work having an organic unity and a conscious design. Pisani is evidently right in his comment that the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* has fully brought out its fundamental homogeneity; the elimination of spurious repetitions and additions on the authority of sound manuscripts has removed whatever appearance it had of a random collection, which led scholars like Hopkins and Winternitz to dissect its various limbs with a modern eye and conclude that it is just a compilation of a mass of diverse poetry, "the result of a pure accident." The falsity of the "surgical method" adopted by these scholars has been adequately illustrated by Pisani,<sup>4</sup> whose own thesis on the origin of the *Mahābhārata* is an elaboration of the theory first propounded by Sukthankar in his pioneer work the "Epic Studies VI." Sukthankar contends that the present *Mahābhārata* had an earlier *Bhārata* version mentioned in the *Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra*,<sup>5</sup> consisting of 24,000 verses only.<sup>6</sup> It was a popular poem, a property of the bards (*sūtas*),

1. Winternitz, HIL, Vol. I, pp. 501-16.; M. A. Mahendale, AIU, p. 254; also see Bulcke, *Rāmakathā*, p. 36f.

2. V. S. Sukthankar, "Epic Studies" in ABORI, XVIII, pp. 1-76; reprinted in *Sukthankar Memorial Edition*, pp. 278-337; V. Pisani, *Festschrift Thomas*, pp. 166-76; R. N. Dandekar, *University of Ceylon Review*, XII, pp. 65-85.

3. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 326.

4. Pisani, *op. cit.*, p. 167f.

5. *The Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra*, III. 4.4.

6. *Mbh.*, I. 1.61.



that dealt with the story of war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas of the tribe of the Bharatas. It was appropriated by the Bhṛguide brāhmaṇas at a crucial stage of its development, and they were in the main responsible for its inflation into a poem of one hundred thousand verses and its transformation into the *Mahābhārata*. Sukthankar points out the influence of the Bhārgavas in the episodal portions (*upākhyānas*) of the epic<sup>1</sup> and thinks that the Bhārgavas were also responsible for the incorporation of the mass of didactic stuff contained in the *Śānti* and the *Anuśāsana*<sup>2</sup> Parvas. He holds that the Bhṛgu had specialised in law and ethics (*dharma* and *nīti*), and the *Manu smṛti* known as the *Bhṛgu Samhitā* was their production. He further states that the Bhṛgu had “developed leanings towards Viṣṇuism”,<sup>3</sup> and that the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Śānti Parva* indicate Bhārgava influence.<sup>4</sup> We may point out that the story of the partiality of the Bhṛgu to Nārāyaṇa is preserved in the Purāṇas also, and according to one legend mentioned in several Purāṇas<sup>5</sup> goddess Śrī was born as the daughter of the sage Bhṛgu who bestowed her on Nārāyaṇa. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*<sup>6</sup> describes how Bhṛgu was deputed by the seers to find out the greatest of the gods. He visited all the three gods, Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, and declared Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu to be the highest.

Thus in the opinion of Sukthankar<sup>7</sup>, the ancient *Bhārata* epic underwent “an important unitary diaskeuasis” under a band of Bhārgava poets; and the motive behind this diaskeuasis was to educate and initiate the masses into brāhmaṇical laws of social and religious morality for which the popular epic provided a convenient vehicle for instruction.<sup>8</sup> He suggests that just as different recensions

1. Sukthankar Memorial Edition, p. 334.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 334-5.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 308; 316.

5. *Infra*, p. 140.

6. *Bhā. Pu.*, X. 89. 2-19.

7. Sukthankar, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-7.

8. In support of Sukthankar's hypothesis, we may point out that the text critical studies of the *Mahābhārata* have shown (see Belvelkar, ABORI, XXVI, 1945, p. 108) that the earlier version of the epic was in the normal *Anuṣṭubh* metre, which in the *Brāhmaṇa* and the *Sūtra* works (see the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, II. 102; *Śāṅkhāyana Srauta Sūtra*, XIV. 33. 18-9 quoted by Sharma, *Sū. Anc. Ind.* p. 55) is invariably assigned to the *śūdra* caste. The later exaggerated version often employs the *Triṣṭubh* metre generally apportioned to the *kṣattriya* class. This perhaps suggests the transformation of a popular poem into a treatise advocating the views of the upper classes.



of the Vedas were properties of their respective schools (*caranas*), the revised version of the epic was the property of the Bhārgavas for some time, and additions, and alterations into the first Bhārgava redaction were initially made by the Bhārgavas themselves. Later, with the growth in the popularity of the epic, other hands also made some interpolations, but the extant *Mahābhārata*, on the whole, is a Bhārgava composition. Pisani, agreeing with Sukthankar, states that the *Mahābhārata* is “a work of religious and social renewal”,<sup>1</sup> and the work of one poet, who belonged to the Bhārgava clan and, who seizing the older pre-existing material, recast it and produced the great epic of India.<sup>2</sup> We may state that the conversion of a popular poem into Dharmaśāstra, a religious work, was not a casual affair and the redactors of the *Mahābhārata* intended to rejuvenate the brāhmaṇical social order by means of some timely religious and social reform. The period between 200 B.C.-A.D. was one of the great social upheavals. The old order of varṇa was considerably weakened<sup>3</sup> by the advent of the foreign hordes in considerable numbers and the rise of new arts and crafts, which had brought about an improvement in the conditions of the lower varṇas, especially the śūdras, and necessitated the removal of at least some of the disabilities imposed upon them in the earlier scheme of things. The door of Vedic rites and worship was closed to the śūdras; so the progressives among the brāhmaṇas, took hold of the non-Vedic, popular cults and preached brāhmaṇical rules of social ethics through them. Of these, the cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was one of the most powerful, and the brāhmaṇisation of this god was effected with his recognition as an incarnation of the brāhmaṇical god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.<sup>4</sup> For these reformed cults the epics and the Purāṇas, which dealt with ancient heroic lays and legendary narratives, were the most suitable medium.<sup>5</sup> The revised version of the *Bhārata* is the first fruit of this reformist movement. On the one hand, it preaches the divine sanctity of the varṇa system, on the other hand, it adopts a liberal attitude towards the śūdras and the lower classes. The history of the rise of the great epic has a great significance for the study of Vaiṣṇavism, for it is in this epic that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is identified with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.

1. Pisani, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3.

3. Sharma, *Śū. Anc. Ind.*, pp. 175-220.

4. *Infra*, p. 108.

5. Kosambi, *JESHO*, IV, p. 210.



Sukthankar, who devoted the best part of his life to the *Mahābhārata* studies, comes to the conclusion that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was already recognised as a god at the time of the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, and there is not a passage in the whole of the epic which does not presuppose his divinity;<sup>1</sup> we may suggest that the *Mahābhārata* makes an unceasing and eminently successful attempt to brāhmaṇise the cult of this divinity by establishing his identification with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.

Pisani writes<sup>2</sup> that the epigraphic and other pieces of evidence establish it clearly that the *Mahābhārata* must have existed at about A.D. 500;<sup>3</sup> but as it mentions the Yavanas (Greeks), Pahlavas (Parthians), Cīnas (Chinese), Tukhāras (Tocharians), Hūṇas, Romakas (Romans) and Śakas (Scythians), it could not be earlier than the second century A.D. Hence the *Mahābhārata* must have been compiled between the second and the fourth century A.D.<sup>4</sup> However, Moti Chandra has shown<sup>5</sup> that the manner and the sequence in which these tribes are referred to in the *Sabhā Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* correspond to their positions in the second century B.C. He identifies the Hūṇas mentioned in these passages with the Hiung-nu who were living in Mongolia on the borders of China;<sup>6</sup> and his suggestion<sup>7</sup> that, although an actual contact with Rome was not established before the reign of emperor Augustus in the first century B.C., the Indians, who had frequent intercourse with the Seleucids of Syria, might have heard of Rome and its growing power even in the second century B.C. may not be regarded as completely impossible. However, in our opinion, since there is no denying that the *Mahābhārata* has received numerous interpolations even after its first promulgation as a Dharmaśāstra, it would be wrong to determine the date of its rise on the basis of such individual, isolated passages. But Moti Chandra also draws<sup>8</sup> our attention to such events as the

1. Sukthankar, *On the Meanings of the Mahābhārata*, p. 63.

2. Pisani, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

3. Also see Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 69.

4. Pusalker writes that Sukthankar was very much impressed by the arguments of Pisani, and had requested Pusalker to go through Pisani's article carefully. See *The Studies in the Epics and the Purāṇas*, p. xxxiii, f.n. 45.

5. Moti Chandra, *Geographical and Economic Studies in the Mahābhārata; Upāyana Parva*, p. 29 ; 60 f.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29.



sending of an embassy to the Greek king Antiochus and the seige of Mādhyamikā by the Yavanas; and his detailed treatment of the geographical and economic data contained in the *Sabhā Parva* leads him to the conclusion that it must have been composed during the reign of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga in the second century B.C. We may say that this is the most probable date of the first appearance of the *Mahābhārata* as the harbinger of brāhmaṇical renaissance. The earliest evidence<sup>1</sup> indicating an identification of the popular god Vāsudeva with the brāhmaṇical Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu is dated in the 14th regnal year of the fifth Śuṅga king Bhāgabhadra, and the *Mahābhārata* which is the earliest document propagating the identity of the two may be ascribed to the reign of the first Śuṅga. This does not mean that the entire epic as we have it now was first proclaimed in the Śuṅga period. Large additions were made to it in the subsequent centuries. Much of the *Śānti* and the *Anuśāsana Parvas* is of a later date, and the final redaction seems to have been completed some time in the early Gupta age; but the brāhmaṇical orientation of a popular poem with a bias towards the worship of Vāsudeva-Nārāyaṇa was apparently accomplished in the era following the rule of Aśoka when the brāhmaṇical order was faced with grave internal and external threats. The *Bhagavadgītā* formed the heart of this new creation, and in the words of Sukthankar it was "the keystone of the whole new superstructure of the remodelled Bhārata."<sup>2</sup> It epitomised all that the new recension sought to preach, and even its structural plan was modelled on that of the *Mahābhārata*. Just as the epic is divided into eighteen Parvas, the *Gītā* is divided into eighteen chapters. Eighteen appears to have some special significance for the brāhmaṇical redactors; the *Mahābhārata* war was fought for eighteen days, although in the earlier version the number of days was much less.<sup>3</sup> The Purāṇas are also supposed to be eighteen, and it is pointed out that there are eighteen main clan groups of the brāhmaṇas.<sup>4</sup> The deductions based on the style, metre, and language of the *Gītā* prove that it is earlier than the classical poetry; it is one of the earlier poems of the great epic.<sup>5</sup> In our opinion the

1. The Besnagar Inscription of Heliodorus, *infra*, p. 235.

2. *Sukthankar Memorial Edition*, Vol. I, p. 307.

3. Belvalkar, ABORI, XXVI, p. 115f.

4. Kosambi, *The Enquiry*, No. 2, p. 6.

5. Winternitz, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 438; cf. Kosambi, JESHO, IV, pp. 203f.



*Bhagavadgītā* is intrinsically connected with the remodelled version, and the date of the *Bhagavadgītā* is the date of the *Mahābhārata*.

Although attempts are made at the stratification and dissection of the *Bhagavadgītā* also, these have proved even more futile than those made in the case of the *Mahābhārata*. It has all the appearances of a uniform composition, all of a piece. A mass of literature has been produced dealing with the origin, meanings and various other aspects of the *Gītā*, and the majority of scholars viewed it as an independent homogeneous work inserted into the epic quite arbitrarily by some compiler. Winternitz wrote that it was originally an Upaniṣad of the Bhāgavatas written some time in the second century B. C.;<sup>1</sup> and he agreed with Edgerton that it should be placed before the beginning of the Christian era. Bhandarkar<sup>2</sup> and Telang<sup>3</sup> dated it in the fourth century B.C., and Senart<sup>4</sup> not later than the third century B.C. However, the consensus of opinion seems to be in favour of a date in the second century B.C.,<sup>5</sup> when in our view the great epic itself was composed. It is suggested<sup>6</sup> that the Besnagar inscription of Heliodorus alludes to some verses of the *Gītā*, but we may point out that the earliest unmistakable reference to the verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* is found in a work of the famous Buddhist scholar Āryadeva who lived towards the end of the second century A.D.<sup>7</sup> He refers to these under the name of 'the doctrine of Māṭhara', while explaining the conception of Nirvāṇa in the heretical and Hinayāna schools mentioned in the *Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra*.<sup>8</sup> Āryadeva's treatise was translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci during his stay in China in A.D. 508-535,<sup>9</sup> and forms a part of the *Abhidharma* section of the Chinese *Tripitaka*. Māṭhara, a politician of uncanny intelligence, was a minister of Kaniṣka II,<sup>10</sup> who ruled in

1. Winternitz, *op. cit.*

2. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 18,

3. Telang, SBE, VIII, p. xci.

4. Senart, ABORI, VIII, p. 320.

5. M. A. Mehendale, AIU, p. 249.

6. K. G. Goswami, *A Study of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 6.

7. Winternitz, HIL, Vol.II, p. 350; Nalinaksha Dutt, *The Classical Age*, p. 381.

8. Appendix B.

9. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 352 ; Suzuki, *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* p. 6.

10. Kimura, *The Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p. 29; but he places Kaniṣka II in A.D. 140.



A. D. 119.<sup>1</sup> He seems to have been a contemporary of Nāgārjuna, the teacher of Āryadeva.

The problem of the date of the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* has not received much attention of the scholars. However, hardly anyone would now subscribe to the views of the earlier scholars<sup>2</sup> who placed the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Śānti Parva*, which includes the *Nārāyaṇīya*, in the sixth century B.C. In our opinion the *Nārāyaṇīya* should be ascribed to the third or the first half of the fourth century A.D.; it is later than the *Bhagavadgītā*, mentioned in it as the *Harigītā*.<sup>3</sup> Its language is full of alliterations and it could not be far removed from the age of Kālidāsa and other classical poets.<sup>4</sup> It mentions Rāma son of Daśaratha among the incarnations of Viṣṇu,<sup>5</sup> and we have shown elsewhere<sup>6</sup> that the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic was recognised as such some time in the second century A.D. when the first and the last books of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were composed. It describes the deity as Tuṣita, Mahātuṣita and Harimedha.<sup>7</sup> The first two designations betray a Buddhist influence, for the two were generally used by the Buddhists to denote a particular class of gods, and the last mentioned, according to one suggestion,<sup>8</sup> is the Sanskritised form of the Sassanian Haramuz. The name Harimedha, or Harimedhas occurs several times<sup>9</sup> in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section, and it may indicate that the work was composed not before the Kuṣāṇa rule. The mention of Mahāvarāha<sup>10</sup> in a passage of the *Nārāyaṇīya* also points to its late age, for the earlier use is simply of Varāha, epithets such as Mahāvarāha, and Ādivarāha are frequent in the works of Kālidāsa, Pravarasena, and the Gupta records but are not mentioned earlier. Besides, the *Nārāyaṇīya* gives the earliest exposition of the doctrine

1. D. C. Sircar, AIU, pp. 150-1.

2. S.K. Aiyangar, *Proceedings of the Second Oriental Conference*, Calcutta, 1923, p. 353 ; N.B. Utgikar, *Proceedings of the Fourth Oriental Conference*, Allahabad, 1926 (1928), Vol. II, pp. 107-32.

3. *Mbh.*, XII. 336. 49; also see v. 8 of the same section.

4. Cf. *Mbh.*, XII. 325, also see S. C. Roy, *The Bhagavadgītā and Modern Scholarship*, p. 180f.

5. *Mbh.*, XII. 326. 78-81.

6. *Infra*, p. 174.

7. *Mbh.* XII. 325. 4. Nos. 43, 44, 133.

8. V. S. Agrawala, ABORI, XXXVII, pp. 5-6.

9. *Mbh.*, XII. 323. 12 ; 333.28 ; 335.8 ; 337.54.

10. *Mbh.*, XII. 335.1.



of the vyūhas, and in our opinion, the doctrine was evolved about the second century A.D.<sup>1</sup> However, we may note that the *Nārāyaṇīya* makes no mention of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī; obviously, it attaches no importance to her. Only once, and that too quite casually in the eulogy recited by Nārada in the Śvetadvīpa, Viṣṇu is given the epithets of *lakṣmyāvāsa* and *śrīvāsa*,<sup>2</sup> the dwelling place of Lakṣmī and Śrī, just as he is described as the abode of fame (*yaśaḥ*), asceticism (*tapah*), learning (*vidyā*), renown (*kīrti*) and of all things (*sarvāvāsa*).<sup>3</sup> We know that Śrī-Lakṣmī came to be installed by the side of Viṣṇu in the Gupta period, and reference to her in the Gupta records indicate the popularity of the myths uniting her with Viṣṇu. Hence, in our opinion, the complete silence of the *Nārāyaṇīya* section about the relations of the goddess with Viṣṇu strongly suggests that the section was composed before her union with Viṣṇu. The evidence adduced so far points to a date in the late Kuṣāṇa age, and in support of it we may refer to the view of Grierson who was also of opinion that the *Nārāyaṇīya* should be dated in the period between the second and the fourth century A.D.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Āśvamedhika Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Anugītā* section purports to be a sequel to the composition of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and although it is supposed to be a restatement of the doctrines preached in the *Bhagavadgītā*, its main theme seems to be the exaltation of the brāhmaṇas. It is generally accepted to be a very late addition.<sup>5</sup>

The *Harivaṃśa* forms a supplement to the *Mahābhārata* and is one of the main sources for the myths of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes, it is also described as a Purāṇa. The work seems to have undergone several revisions and in its present form may be attributed to about A.D. 400.<sup>6</sup>

The Purāṇas form another important source, but their dates are very uncertain. Of the eighteen Mahā-Purāṇas, the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, the *Brahmāṇḍa*, the *Vāyu* and the *Viṣṇu* appear to be earlier than the rest, but as the last three contain the genealogy of the Gupta kings,

1. *Infra*, p. 36.

2. *Mbh.*, XII. 325.4. Nos. 125, 128.

3. *Ibid.*, nos. 123; 124; 126; 127 ; 129.

4. Grierson, IA, 1908, p. 258.

5. Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India*, p. 402.

6. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 464. f n. 2; R. C. Hazra, *Indian Culture*, II, p. 237; also see Sivaprasada Bhattacharya, *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Letters, XXII, 1956 pp. 155-161.



these could not have been redacted finally before the fourth century A.D. R.C. Hazra has made a detailed comparative study of the Purāṇic chapters, and his conclusions may be accepted as a working hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> In his opinion different chapters of the Purāṇas containing the smṛti material were written and added to them at different periods, however, the latest of such additions in the *Mārkaṇḍeya* (with the exclusion of the *Devī-Māhātmya* section), the *Brahmāṇḍa* and the *Vāyu Purāṇas* were made before the fifth century A.D., and most probably in the period between the third and the fifth centuries A.D., So apparently these Purāṇas could not have acquired final form before this period. About the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* Hazra is quiet positive; and he expressly assigns it to the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth century A.D.<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of Winternitz also it is not later than the fifth century A.D.<sup>3</sup> However, Tadpatrikar<sup>4</sup> has shown that, among all the Purāṇas, the *Brahma Purāṇa* contains the earliest version of the Kṛṣṇa legend; and as such it constitutes an important source. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, one of the most popular scriptures of the Vaiṣṇavas, elaborates most of the legends narrated in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and is certainly a later composition. It is generally considered to be a very late work<sup>5</sup>, but according to Hazra it should be assigned to the first half of the sixth century A.D.<sup>6</sup> Still, the problem of its date is far from settled<sup>7</sup>, and it may not be safe to rely upon its evidence for chronological deductions. Further, in Hazra's opinion the *Matsya Purāṇa* has received repeated additions and suffered losses, and the date of its chapters ranges from the last quarter of the third<sup>8</sup> to the tenth century A.D.<sup>9</sup> He further states that the *Matsya Purāṇa* was originally compiled by the Vaiṣṇavas, the Śaivite chapters being later additions.<sup>10</sup>

The Upa-purāṇas as a class of literature are generally considered to be of late origin. Recently, R.C. Hazra has made a detailed

1. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, II-IV. for a chronological table see *ibid.*, pp. 174-189.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
3. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 545, f.n. 2.
4. Tadpatrikar, 'Kṛṣṇa Problem', *ABORI*, X, p. 276.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 556; in the opinion of Haraprasada Shastri the Purāṇa has undergone three stages of development, see *JBORS*, 1928, p. 335.
6. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 55, f.n. 97.
7. M.A. Mehendale, *The Classical Age*, p. 293.
8. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 51.



study of some of these. He has come to the conclusion that a few of the Upa-purāṇas were written fairly early, and the designation Upa-purāṇa was ascribed to them much later. In his opinion the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, which he describes as a Pañcarātra work,<sup>1</sup> should be dated in the period between A.D. 400 and 500.<sup>2</sup> He fixes the upper limit of this text on the basis of the occurrence of such terms as *hibuka*, *horā*, *rāśi*, the names of week days, etc., and points out passages indicating the influence of the earlier smṛti texts.<sup>3</sup> The lower limit is determined by an analysis of its contents, and by tracing out the verses of this Purāṇa quoted in later works.<sup>4</sup> Earlier, Winternitz had ascribed it to a period between A.D. 628 and 1000, on the assumption that the *Paitāmaha Siddhānta* contained in the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara* is an extract from the *Brahma-Sphuṭa-Siddhānta* of Brahmagupta written in A.D. 628;<sup>5</sup> but according to Hazra, this section of the Purāṇa is a summary of some earlier work, and he points out<sup>6</sup> that according to some commentators, Brahmagupta wrote his work on the basis of the section found in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. No doubt the Purāṇa is more in the nature of a compilation than that of an original treatise; it deals with multifarious subjects and seems to contain summaries of earlier works. Nevertheless, as Hazra notes,<sup>7</sup> there are numerous cross-references in the work, and although it contains several interpolated passages and spurious chapters, the majority of its chapters belong to the same date, that is, to the period between A. D. 400 and 500. In the first quarter of the fifth century A.D. Candragupta II was the ruling monarch. We may note that in this Purāṇa king Vajra, one of the principal interlocutors, is often addressed as *narendra-candra* and *nṛpa-candra*. The expressions, literally meaning the moon among kings, seem to refer to the reigning sovereign, who is described as *narendra-candra* on his Lion-Slayer type coins.<sup>8</sup> Evidently he assumed the title of *narendra*, for which the work shows a too obvious preference over other synonyms such as *rājan* and *rājendra*. It is

1. Hazra, *St. Up.*, p. 216, *Journal of the University of Gauhati*, Vol. III. p. 62.

2. Ibid., p. 212.

3. Ibid., pp. 197-206.

4. Ibid., pp. 206f.

5. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 580.

6. Hazra, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

7. Ibid., p. 212, f.n. 251.

8. Altekar, *The Bayana Hoard*, pp. 192f.



the favourite mode of address for king Vajra in our Purāṇa. Once king Purūravā too is described as *narendra-candra*. He is also given the epithet of *narendra-siṃha*,<sup>1</sup> and we know that *narendra-siṃha* was one of the titles of Candragupta II<sup>2</sup>. The veiled description of the king as Purūravā is evidently an imitation of the poet Kālidāsa who substituted Vikrama, a title of Candragupta II, in place of Purūravā, in his famous drama the *Vikramorvśīya*, suggesting the identity of the two kings<sup>3</sup>. At any rate, the mention of the phrases, *narendra-candra* and *nṛpa-candra*, as many as eighteen times<sup>4</sup> in the body of the work, does not seem entirely fortuitous. These occur mostly at the end of the chapters, and not unoften at the end of a particular section. Besides, we may draw attention to a passage<sup>5</sup> of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, which recommends the selection of the successor out of the members of the royal family by the king and the prominent people of the state. It apparently refers to the practice followed by the gupta rulers, who did not seem to have had a fixed rule about succession, and several of whom appear to have been selected for the throne on account of their merit. The Allahabad pillar inscription informs how Samudra-gupta was chosen by his father as his successor in preference to all the other princes of the royal line.<sup>6</sup> Similarly he chose Candragupta II to succeed him from among his several sons as the most worthy of them all. Although most scholars assign a very late date to this work, we may suggest that the Purāṇa was originally compiled in the reign of Candragupta II.

The smṛtis are manuals of the code of conduct, and some of these throw welcome light on the rituals and religious practices of *smārta* Vaiṣṇavas, that is, those worshippers of Viṣṇu who observed the brāhmaṇical rules of the smṛtis. The introductory chapter of the *Manu-smṛti* attributes the creation of the universe to Nārāyaṇa,<sup>7</sup> and although it is a non-sectarian work, it helps us understand social

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, I, 154.37,

2. Raychaudhuri, PHAI, p. 553.

3. In the opinion of Hazra the *Viṣṇudharmottara* account of the story indicates the influence of the play of Kalidāsa. See Hazra, *St. Up.* 163.

4. *Viṣṇudh* I. 74.45 ; 89.13 ; 14 ; 132.35 ; 144.23 ; 158.5 ; 164.40 ; 191.10 ; 221.72 ; 250.36 ; II. 1.13 ; 7.9 ; III. 9.23 ; 17.63 ; 25.75 ; 31.58 ; 87.63 ; 93.47.

5. *Ibid.*, II, 3.8 ; 4.1.

6. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 255, lines 7-8 of the ins.

7. *Msm.*, I. 10-11.



conditions under which Purāṇic Vaiṣṇavism came into being. It is generally assigned to the period between 200 B.C. to A.D. 200;<sup>1</sup> it seems to have attained its present form by the end of this period.<sup>2</sup> A large number of its verses are found in the books third, twelfth and thirteenth of the *Mahābhārata*, and thus are creations of the same complex which gave rise to the *Mahābhārata*<sup>3</sup>. The *Viṣṇu smṛti* seems to have been originally a Dharma Sūtra of the Kāthaka school<sup>4</sup> recast by some adherent of Vaiṣṇavism in the third century A.D.<sup>5</sup> It indicates<sup>6</sup> the influence of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* in some of the passages, and contains the earliest account of the ritual of worship.<sup>7</sup>

The Sūtra works are generally ascribed to the period between c. 500-200 B.C.,<sup>8</sup> but some of these are apparently late compositions written or reshaped in the centuries following the Christian era. The *Vaikhānasa Gṛhya Sūtra* and the *Vaikhānasa Dharma Sūtra* are traditionally known as the latest of the Sūtras, and W. Caland, who has edited and translated them,<sup>9</sup> is of the opinion that their final redaction took place sometime in the fourth century A.D.<sup>10</sup> He holds that both the *Gṛhya* and the *Dharma Sūtras* of the *Vaikhānasas* were composed by the same author, but the *Śrauta Sūtra* is written by some different hand<sup>11</sup> and comes later. He points out that the word *tāmbūla* (betel) occurs in the *Dharma Sūtra* section,<sup>12</sup> and refers to Kern for the view that the habit of betel-chewing became popular after Caraka before the time of Suśruta. However, Gode has shown that the *Caraka Saṃhitā* mentions *tāmbūla*,<sup>13</sup> and now it is held<sup>14</sup> that the betel leaves were introduced into India sometime in the first

1. Bühler, SBE, XXV, Intro. pp. cxiv-cxviii ; Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, p. xi.

2. Dasgupta and De, HSL., Vol. I. p. xxvi.

3. Supra, pp. 11-2 ; Macdonell, HSL, p. 429.

4. M.A. Mehendale, op. cit., p. 256.

5. J. Jolly, SBE, VII, p. xxxii.

6. Ibid.

7. Infra, Chap. V.

8. Macdonell, op. cit., p. 244.

9. Both the *Gṛhya* and the *Dharma Sūtras* of the *Vaikhānasas* are edited and translated by Caland under the heading, *The Vaikhānasa Smārta Sūtra*.

10. Caland, Intro. to the tr. of *Vai. Sm. Sū.*, p. xvi.

11. Ibid., p. xii.

12. Ibid., p. xv, the reference, *Vai. Sm. Sū.* IX. 13, given by Caland, is a misprint for X. 13.

13. P.K. Gode, *Studies in Indian Cultural History*, I, p. 159.

14. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii, p. 734 ; Gode, op. cit., pp. 129-30 ; 165.



century A.D. Caland further states<sup>1</sup> that the Sūtra speaks of the Greek sequence of planets and mentions the names of the days of the week<sup>2</sup> which came in vogue, according to Jacobi, towards the end of the third century A.D. The earliest dated mention of a weekday is traced to an inscription of A.D. 484.<sup>3</sup> Hence the date of the *Vaikhānasa Smārta Sūtra* could not be earlier than the fourth century A.D. The sūtra is particularly attached to the cult of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu and treats in detail the rituals of the Vaiṣṇavas. The *Gr̥hya Sūtra* of *Baudhāyana* is supposed to be of greater antiquity, for the *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra* refers to it at several places.<sup>4</sup> Bühler<sup>5</sup> thinks that the original *Baudhāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* consisted of only the first two or three *Praśnas*, the rest being later additions. However, the chapter on *baliharana* in the text edited by Shama Sastri is a later interpolation.<sup>6</sup> The *Baudhāyana Gr̥hya-Paribhāṣāsūtra* and the *Gr̥hya-Śeṣasūtra* are supplementaries attached to the *Gr̥hya Sūtra*, very probably in the fifth-sixth century A.D. The *Śeṣasūtra* mentions the names of weekdays<sup>7</sup> and prescribes sectarian mantras invoking the god as Mahāpuruṣa and Mahāviṣṇu, epithets which are in harmony with the high sounding titles of the Gupta monarchs, and may not have been invented much earlier. The *Bhagavadgītā* speaks of the god simply as Puruṣa and Viṣṇu. The idea of Mahāviṣṇu apparently presupposes the conception of a lesser Viṣṇu functioning in the trinity of the Purāṇic gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and it is generally held that trinitarianism is the latest feature of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>8</sup> and may not have been evolved earlier than the Kuṣāṇa age, remarkable for its syncretistic tendencies.<sup>9</sup>

1. Caland, op. cit., p. xvi.

2. Macdonell, op. cit., p. 262.

3. Fleet, CII, III, pp. 88-9.

4. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, Vol. I, p. 10 ; 20.

5. Bühler, SBE, XIV, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

6. See the editor's footnote on p. 31 of *Baudha. Gr̥. Sū.*

7. *Baudha Gr̥. Sū.*, I. 16.22f. III. 11.1 ; see Shamasastri, preface to the *Gr̥hya Sūtra*, p. vi.

8. Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India*, p. 190 ; *Epic Mythology*, p. 231.

9. Banerjea, DHI. II ed., p. 125. Trinitarianism became very popular in the fourth-fifth centuries A.D. and is referred to in the works of Kālidāsa (*Kumarasambhava*, II. 4, *Raghuvamśa*, X.16), and the *Bṛhaspati-smṛti* (Sansk-āra-kāṇḍa, 559-60). For a third century image of *trimūrti*, ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 276.



The earliest epigraphs referring to the god as Mahāpuruṣa<sup>1</sup> and Mahāviṣṇu<sup>2</sup> are dated in the fifth and the sixth centuries A.D., and the composition of the supplementary portions of the *Baudhāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* may be assigned to the same general date.

A vast amount of the literature of the Pañcarātras, a sect of the Vaiṣṇavas, was produced in the Gupta age and the centuries following it. According to the traditional list there are 108 Pañcarātra Saṁhitās, but more than 215 are actually mentioned<sup>3</sup>. In the opinion of Winternitz, the earliest among these date from the fifth to the ninth century A.D.<sup>4</sup> Schrader fixes the *terminus ad quem* in the eighth century A.D., but is of the opinion that some of the Saṁhitās might have existed at the time of or even before the composition of the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>5</sup> He suggests that the allusion to the *sāttvata vidhi*, that is, the Sattvata way of worship, in the *Bhīṣma Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, refers to some work of the type of the extent Pañcarātra Saṁhitās.<sup>6</sup> The Pañcarātra Saṁhitās are full of Tantric elements and as such are generally dated later than the *Mahābhārata*, which is almost free from Tantric ideas. However, Schrader contends that the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* mainly deals with the myths and legends of the Pañcarātras, and is not interested in the ritualistic details of their system. So, according to him, the Tantric rituals mentioned in the Pañcarātra Saṁhitās may have been known or practised in the period represented by the *Mahābhārata*. In support of his argument we may add that the *Nārāyaṇīya* appears well conversant with the Tantric terminology of the Pañcarātras, for it refers to the *mānasa japa*, mental worship, of the Pañcarātrins, who provide detailed instructions for its performance<sup>7</sup> in their work, the *Jayākhyā Saṁhitā*. The *Nārāyaṇīya* speaks of the god as *pañcakālakartṛgata*,<sup>8</sup> one who is known or attained by a performer of the *pañcakālas*, and the

1. EI, XXIII, No. 14.

2. Bādāmi ins. of A.D. 578, IA, III, pp. 305-6.

3. Schrader, *Intro. Pañca.*, pp. 4-13.

4. Winternitz, HIL, Vol. I, p. 590.

5. Schrader, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

7. *Infra*, Chap. V.

8. *Mbh.*, XII. 325. 4. no. 58 ; P.C. Roy (tr., Vol. X, p. 547) following Nilakanṭha explains it as 'one who is the maker of the five divisions of time, day, night, month, season and year' ; but see *infra*, Chap. V.



*pañcakālas* or the five acts of worship are explained in detail in the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*.<sup>1</sup> Similarly the *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* in its chapter mentioning the one thousand names of Viṣṇu speaks of the god as *samayajña*,<sup>2</sup> which is a designation of the initiate in the *Pañcarātra Saṃhitās*.<sup>3</sup> Very probably at the time of the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata* there existed some kind of *Pañcarātra* literature similar to the extant *Saṃhitās*. Schrader ascribes greatest antiquity and authority to the *Pauṣkara*, the *Sāttvata* and the *Jayākhya Saṃhitās*, on the basis of the internal evidence provided by the *Ahīrbudhnya* and the *Īśvara Saṃhitās*.<sup>4</sup> The date of the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* is further discussed by B. Bhattacharya, who examines the work from doctrinal and palaeographical angles, the latter being an analysis of the names of the alphabets given in the *Jayākhya* for ritual purposes. He comes to the conclusion that the work should be placed in the middle of the fifth century A.D.<sup>5</sup> The *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā* is another of the early *Saṃhitās*. Schrader ascribes it to the fourth-fifth century A.D.,<sup>6</sup> and in the opinion of Winternitz it was written not long after the fourth century A.D.<sup>7</sup> As it refers to the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*, it may be dated in the last quarter of the sixth century A.D. It seems to have originated in the north-western part of India, very probably in Kashmir.<sup>8</sup>

The Rāma and Vāsudeva legends were popular with the Jainas and the Buddhists as well; and the latter have preserved a more primitive version of these stories in the form of the *Daśaratha* and the *Ghaṭa Jātaka*. The earliest Jaina version of the Rāma story is found in the *Paumacariya* of Vimalasūri, whose date is controversial. According to a verse<sup>9</sup> found in the work it was written in the first century A.D.; but Jacobi, who first edited it, thought that it could not have been composed earlier than the second or the third century A.D. K.H. Dhruva suggested a date between A.D. 678 and 778 and was supported by some other scholars, but the arguments favouring a late date have been convincingly refuted by Pandit Nathuram

1. *Jaya. Sam.*, XXII. 64-74.

2. *Mbh.*, XIII. 149-52,

3. *Infra*, Chap. V. p. 140.

4. Schrader, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1.

5. B. Bhattacharya, *Intro. to the Jayā. Sam.*, p. 34.

6. Schrader, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

7. Winternitz, *op. cit.*, p. 589.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Paumacariya*, cxviii, 103.



Premi,<sup>1</sup> Chaugule and Vaidya,<sup>2</sup> and V.M. Kulkarni.<sup>3</sup> Chaugule and Vaidya assign it to the second century A.D., but as the work mentions Aṣṭavidha Pūjā, Jina-Pratimā-Pratiṣṭhāpana, and similar late elaborate rituals, Kulkarni, like Jacobi, prefers to place it in the third century A.D. Vimalasūri mocks at those poets who conceived of the Rākṣasas and Vānaras in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as man-eating demons and monkeys, and thinks that they were a race of the Vidyādharas, a class of superhuman beings; but the essential elements of his narrative are the same as that of Vālmīki. Vimalasūri is known to have written also the *Harivaṃśa-Cariya* which is unfortunately lost. Besides these, references to Vaiṣṇavite divinities in other Jaina and Buddhist sources help us occasionally in tracing the development of Vaiṣṇavism and its progress. Among the Jaina canons, reduced to writing sometime in the fifth century A.D.,<sup>4</sup> the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* and the *Antagaḍa Dasāo* are important non-brāhmaṇical sources containing the legends of the Vṛṣṇis.<sup>5</sup> The Buddhist works, the *Avadānaśataka*, the *Milindapañha* and the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka* make stray references to the Vaiṣṇavite divinities; of these the first two may be placed in the first century A.D.,<sup>6</sup> and the last a century later.<sup>7</sup> The Buddhist writer Aśvaghoṣa was well acquainted with brāhmaṇical ideas and myths, and his works often refer to these. He is generally dated in A.D. 100. Finally we come to the *Lalitavistara*, a Buddhist text in Purāṇic style and of uncertain date. It was translated into Tibetan in the ninth century A.D., but according to Keith<sup>8</sup> the main text may be assigned to the second century A.D. In its present form it appears to be a work of the Gupta period. It sheds

1. Quoted by Hiralal Jain and A.N. Upadhye in the *Padma Purāṇa* of Raviṣeṇa, Vol. I, Bhāratīya Jñānapitha Mūrtidevi Jaina Granthamala, No. 20, p. 6.
2. Chaugule and Vaidya, *Paumacariya*, Intro. pp. vii-ix.
3. Kulkarni, *Paumacariya* Intro. Prakrit Text Society Series No. 6, pp. 8f.
4. Jacobi, SBE, XXII, p. xxxvii; Winternitz, HIL, Vol. II. p. 432.
5. *Infra*, p. 87.
6. For the *Avadānaśataka*, Daśgupta and De, HSL, Vol. I, pp. 81-2, for the *Milindapañha*, Winternitz, op. cit., p. 174.
7. The *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka* was translated into Chinese in the third century A.D.: (SBE, XXI, Intro., p. xxi); so the work is generally ascribed to the second century A.D. or even to the first century A.D. (N. Dutt, *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*, Intro., p. xvii.).
8. Keith. HSL, pp. 492-3.



interesting light on the transformation of the Buddha into an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu,<sup>1</sup> it indicates first signs of a *rapprochement* between Buddhism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Of secular literature, the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali provides valuable information on the cults of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu and allied deities. Although a grammatical treatise, it frequently resorts to Vaiṣṇavite themes for providing examples and citations.<sup>2</sup> Patañjali appears to have been a contemporary of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, and so the work attributed to him is generally assigned to the second century B.C. However, D. C. Sircar<sup>3</sup> has shown that the *Mahābhāṣya* contains several interpolated passages, he goes further and states that in its present form the work is not earlier than the second century A.D. He points out that the *Mahābhāṣya* quotes such classical metres as Mālatī Praharī, Pramitākṣara, Vasantatilakā, etc., which suggests that the work is of the same date as the later strata of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>4</sup> Patañjali speaks of the Śakas and quotes a verse referring to the vyūha doctrine, and the inscriptional evidence suggests that the vyūha theory was yet to be evolved in the second-first centuries B.C.<sup>5</sup> In support of his contention Sircar cites<sup>6</sup> the authority of Winternitz, Bühler and Barth, who doubted that the *Mahābhāṣya* should be ascribed to the second century B.C. There is much force in the arguments of Sircar, and we are of the opinion that all the references contained in the *Mahābhāṣya* may not reflect the conditions prevalent in the age of the Śuṅgas.

Opinions vary about the date of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata from 200 B.C. to A.D. 300<sup>7</sup>. However, the consensus of opinion appears to be in favour of a date between the second and the third centuries A.D.<sup>8</sup> The work refers<sup>9</sup> to the worship of implements of Viṣṇu, which indicates a developed stage of the cult. The *Gāthā-saptaśatī* attributed to the Sātavāhana king Hāla contains several

1. *Infra*, p. 131.

2. *Infra*, p. 56.

3. D. C. Sircar, *IHQ*, XV, 1939, pp. 633-8.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 634.

5. *Ibid.* p. 635.

6. *Ibid.*

7. M. A. Mahendale, *AIU*, pp. 269-70.

8. *Ibid.*, also see Manomohan Ghosh in his translation of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata, Intro. pp. Lxxxif ; Kane, *A History of Sanskrit Poetics*, p. xi.

9. *Nāṭya Śāstra of Bharata*, III 7.



verses referring to Viṣṇu, his various incarnations, and associate divinities, but the date of this work too is far from certain.<sup>1</sup> Keith<sup>2</sup> is of the opinion that the type of Mahārāṣṭrī Prākṛit in which the verses are composed could not be earlier than A.D. 200. He places the work between A.D. 200 and 450. The anthology has received numerous interpolations, and only 430 of the total stanzas are common to all the recensions.

The works of Bhāsa, Kālidāsa, Viśākhadatta and other poets and dramatists of post-Maurya and Gupta periods often furnish useful material for a study of Vaiṣṇavism. Bhāsa's play, the *Bālacarita*, deals with the early life of the shepherd-god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and his other plays also often refer to Vaiṣṇavite themes treated in the epics and the Purāṇas. The extreme views<sup>3</sup> placing him in the fifth-fourth century B.C. do not bear scrutiny, and he is generally regarded as having lived in the third century A.D.<sup>4</sup> Śūdraka, the author of the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, was apparently later than Bhāsa, and although the dates assigned to him range from the second century B.C. to A.D. 600, the later date is more probable.<sup>5</sup> The date of Kālidāsa is now more or less determined, and he appears to have been a court-poet of Candragupta II.<sup>6</sup> Viśākhadatta may have been his contemporary,<sup>7</sup> and it is held that the *Mudrārākṣasa* makes a veiled reference to Candragupta Vikramāditya<sup>8</sup>. Another notable work of this period is the *Rāvaṇavaha* in Mahārāṣṭrī Prākṛit. It is generally ascribed to Pravarasena II of the Vākāṭaka dynasty.<sup>9</sup> The

1. Winternitz, HIL, Vol. III, pp. 120f ; Keith, HSL, pp. 223f ; for fuller references see Jogalekar, *Hāla sātavāhanācī Gāthāsaptasatī*, pp. 402-3 ; also *Infra* p. 103.
2. Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
3. Pusalker, *Bhāsa : A study*, p. 79, ; some scholars place him in the second century B.C. For a recent study see U. Venkatakrishna Rao, IHQ, XXXIV, 1958, 'Bhāsa', pp. 97-113.
4. M. A. Mahendale, AIU, p. 261 ; for detailed arguments see Keith, HSL, pp. xiif ; A. Banerji Sastri, JRAS, 1921, p. 382 ; F.W. Thomas, JRAS, 1922, pp. 79f.
5. Dasgupta and De, HSL, Vol. I, p. 240 ; Macdonell, *op. cit.*, p. 361.
6. B.S. Upadhyaya, *India in Kālidāsa*, pp. 352-60 ; also Macdonell, *op. cit.*, p. 325 ; Keith, *Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 143f ; HSL, pp. 8f ; R. C. Majumdar in *The Classical Age*, pp. 302-3.
7. Altekar in *The Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p. 406.
8. *Infra*, p. 158, f. n. ?
9. Mirashi, IHQ, XXI, 1945, pp. 193f ; Altekar in *The Early History of the Deccan*, pt. iii, pp. 176-8.



authorship of the book is questioned on the ground that as a devout worshipper of Śiva the Vākāṭaka king would not choose a Vaiṣṇavite theme<sup>1</sup> but this appears baseless. As we shall see later, a synthesis between Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism was one of the main trends of the Gupta period.<sup>2</sup>

Stray references found in the technical literature of the period under study also help us realise the extent and content of Vaiṣṇavism. The two well-known medical treatises, the *Caraka Saṁhitā* and the *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, recommend the recitation of some magical formulae mentioning the names of Vaiṣṇavite divinities as a cure for certain diseases.<sup>3</sup> This indicates the popularity of these gods among the masses. Caraka is stated to have been a physician of Kaniṣka,<sup>4</sup> and so must have lived in the first century A.D. Suśruta is generally supposed to be not later than the fourth century A.D.,<sup>5</sup> he is mentioned in a verse of the *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>6</sup>. The great lexicographer Amarasimha also appears to have written the *Amarakośa* about the fifth century A.D.<sup>7</sup> The synonyms of the names of Vaiṣṇavite divinities given<sup>8</sup> in his lexicon refer to various myths about them and thus indicate their popularity ; and the order in which these names are enumerated shows his knowledge of the vyūha theory of the Vaiṣṇavas.

The inscriptions of this period constitute one of our chief sources, and a study of these is indispensable not only for the political history but also for the cultural and religious history of ancient India. Their testimony is far more reliable than that of the literary texts, which invariably suffer from textual corruptions and late interpolations ; moreover, their dates are generally determined on sound archaeological principles, with an amount of certainty scarcely accorded to any old treatise. So the evidence of the inscriptions is very useful in tracing the evolution of a particular doctrine, idea or

1. D.C. Sircar, AIU, pp. 183-4.

2. *Infra*, p. 165-6.

3. *Infra*, p. 128.

4. Macdonell, *op. cit.*, pp. 435-6.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 436.

6. *Mbh.*, XIII. 4. 55.

7. Macdonell, *op. cit.*, p. 433 ; also see Sharma and Saradesai in introduction to *Amarakośa* p. 1.

8. *Amarakośa*, I. 1. 18f.



myth. On the basis of a passage of dubious import<sup>1</sup> found in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali it was argued<sup>2</sup> that the vyūha doctrine of the Pañcarātras is at least as old as the second century B.C. A correct analysis of some of the inscriptions led to a modification of the view, and now it is held<sup>3</sup> that this doctrine is posterior to the first century B.C.; for the inscriptions of this period give a precedence to Saṅkarṣaṇa over Vāsudeva contrary to the vyūha scheme. Further, the inscriptions are excellent sources indicating the extent of royal patronage enjoyed by Vaiṣṇavism. They also throw some light on the rites and practices of the Vaiṣṇava worshippers, and several records of the Gupta age refer to the festival of Viṣṇu's awakening, the full-moon day of the month of Kārttika, when the Vaiṣṇavas made liberal donations and performed other sacred works.<sup>4</sup> Some of the inscriptions mention the performance of the ceremonies of *bali*, *caru* and *sattra* in Vaiṣṇavite temples, but these rituals are connected with temple-worship in general, and were performed in the shrines of all cults alike. We may not dub them as particularly Vaiṣṇavite. Besides, whereas the literary sources seldom indicate the place of their origin, the geographical provenance of epigraphic records is on the whole easily ascertained; so the relevant references found in them are of great help in defining the sphere of influence and the locality of the cult.

There are not many inscriptions of a Vaiṣṇavite affinity in the pre-Gupta period. Those that are found are mostly of a votive nature marking the erection of some image, temple or part of a temple by some Bhāgavata worshipper. A few of the inscriptions simply begin with an invocation to some Vaiṣṇavite deity or deities, although they deal with non-sectarian matters. The Besnagar inscription<sup>5</sup> of the second century B.C., recording the dedication of a Garuḍa-pillar in honour of *bhagavat* Vāsudeva, is a landmark in the history of Vaiṣṇavism. It is the earliest inscription referring to the cult of a

1. *Janārdanastu-ātma caturtha-eva*, Pat. on Pā. VI. 3.5, R. G. Bhandarkar, who first pointed out the passage, doubted that it referred to the vyūha theory. VSMRS, p. 18.
2. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 87.
3. D.C. Sircar, IHQ, XV, p. 635; J.N. Banerjea (*A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II, pp. 386ff) also is of the opinion that these inscriptions do not refer to the vyūha doctrine.
4. *Infra*, p. 204.
5. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp., 90-1.



Vaiṣṇavite divinity, and it provides the first proof of the popularity of Bhāgavatism even among foreigners. From the fourth century onwards there is an abundance of epigraphs referring to Vaiṣṇavism in some form or the other, which in itself is evidence of the growing spread of the cult during this period. Several of these open with a eulogy of Viṣṇu, often referring to some Purāṇic myth.<sup>1</sup> A large number of the Vaiṣṇavite epigraphs of the Gupta age are landgrants made in favour of some temple or to the brāhmaṇas. The grants are generally meant for providing the necessary materials for worship, for maintaining charitable halls attached to the temples, and for meeting the cost of their repairs and maintenance. This shows that in the Gupta period the temples were well established institutions, which must have had a good number of staff for looking after their various interests. An inscription<sup>2</sup> of A.D. 502 speaks of a *devi karmāntika*, who was apparently an intendant of the estate attached to the temple of a goddess known as Pāṇḍurājā, and who received the grant on behalf of the goddess. Similar staff must have been attached to the Vaiṣṇavite shrines also. The grandeur and magnificence of some of the Vaiṣṇavite temples is described vividly in some Gupta inscriptions.<sup>3</sup>

A study of the legends and motifs found on the coins of this period is no less fruitful from the point of view of Vaiṣṇavism. The coins often illustrate the religious inclinations of the issuing authority, and, like the epigraphs, are of great value in specifying the geographical extent of the cult, in so far as they indicate the faith of the ruler of a particular region. The symbols appearing on the coins are often of a religious nature, although the depiction of tribal or family emblem also is not uncommon. It is possible that some of the punch-marked coins have some Vaiṣṇavite symbols on them, and it has been contended that the figure of a fan-palm capital, the emblem of Saṅkarṣaṇa, is depicted on some Taxila coins,<sup>4</sup> but because of the tiny space and much used state of the coins it is not possible to be definite of its appearance, much less of its religious import. A figure of Viṣṇu appears on a coin of Viṣṇumitra of the so-called Pāñcāla series, datable perhaps in the first half of the first century A.D.,<sup>5</sup> and this is

1. Cf., Junagarh Ins. of Skanda-gupta, see *ibid.*, p. 300 ; Mandasor ins. of the time of Narvarman, lines 1-2, *ibid.*, p. 377.
2. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 403-5, line 11 of the ins.
3. Cf., Junagarh pillar ins. of Skanda-gupta, lines 27-8 ; Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 308.
4. Banerjea, DHI, I ed., pp. 144-5.
5. *Infra*, p. 173.



among the earliest iconographic representations of the god on a coin. With the commencement of the Gupta rule, Vaiṣṇavism became popular with the ruling class, and the coins of the Gupta monarchs and their feudatory kings often display Vaiṣṇavite deities and emblems on them. The devotion of the Gupta king Samudra-gupta is primarily known from his coins which bear the symbol of a Garuḍa-banner. His successor and several other kings describe themselves as *parama-bhāgavatas* on their coins. The coin-legends of the Gupta kings are very interesting and thought-provoking. One of these refers to the doctrine of incarnation and speaks of Kumāra-gupta as if he were the god Narasiṃha incarnate.<sup>1</sup> The title *parama vaiṣṇava* appears<sup>2</sup> for the first time on the coins of the Traikūṭaka king Dahrasena in the fifth century A.D., and this suggests that the use of the epithet 'Vaiṣṇava', which appears only in the latest portions of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>3</sup> came in vogue sometime in the fifth century A.D. Thus the importance of numismatic evidence cannot be underrated in a work on Vaiṣṇavism.

Then there are sculptural and glyptic findings. Some of the extant images of the Vaiṣṇavite divinities are dated as early as the second century B.C.,<sup>4</sup> their find-spots indicate the prevalence of the cult in that area. The growing variety of iconographic forms in the later period denotes the corresponding growth and complexity in the Vaiṣṇavite mythology, which is projected in these figures. The iconography also reflects the forces working for a synthesis of the cults, or the spirit of sectarianism and whereas the image of Harihara is an instance of the first type, some *trīmūrti* icons are fashioned more in the spirit of sectarianism than that of syncretism.<sup>5</sup> Coming to the seals, the excavations conducted at Basāh and Bhīṭā have brought to light a large number of clay seals and sealings belonging to government officials, guilds, temples, private individuals, etc. Most of these bear the names of their owners and their chosen symbols which are useful in finding out their cult-associations. Some of the sealings appear to have been used as votive offerings in Vaiṣṇavite shrines, and have creed formulae inscribed on them. The seals of the private

1. *Infra*, p. 160.

2. Rapson's *Cat Āndhra. etc.*, p. ccvii.

3. *Mbh.* (vul), XVIII. 6. 97.

4. *Infra*, p. 59.

5. T. A. G. Rao, *EHl*, Vol, 1, pt. i, Intro., p. 45.



individuals, guilds, etc., elucidate the extent to which Vaiṣṇavism had penetrated into various groups of society.

Thus we may observe that a perusal of the literary texts is profitable for a knowledge of the myths, doctrines and contents of Vaiṣṇavism; and the epigraphic and other archaeological sources indicate the observances of the Vaiṣṇavas, the patronage of the kings, the rulers, the rich and other socially important personages, and above all, the regional diffusion of the cult.

Our literary sources are mainly brāhmaṇical,<sup>1</sup> and epigraphs and coins represent the viewpoint of the ruling class. There are hardly any popular records which may indicate the popular view of the cult of Viṣṇu and his associate divinities. The Purāṇas contain the type of Vaiṣṇavism which the priestly class wished to promulgate; it may not always be a true reflection of the practices of the worshippers of the popular gods Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, Saṅkarṣaṇa and others. However, certain inferences can be drawn from the mass of legends, myths and rituals described in these works, which often point to a popular origin, and are not always brāhmaṇical fabrications, and which betray the original non-brāhmaṇical and sometimes even anti-brāhmaṇical, character of some of these deities. Such are the myths of the brāhmaṇicide of the god Saṅkarṣaṇa, the denunciation of the cult of sacrifices by the upholder of the mount Govardhana, the shepherd-god Kṛṣṇa, and similar other legends. Nevertheless, our sources contain sufficient traces of the process indicating how the popular cults were brāhmaṇised, and the brāhmaṇical Vaiṣṇavism came into existence in the early centuries of the Christian era, a religion which developed all the potentialities to satisfy the needs of a feudo-agricultural society, and came to acquire a prolonged influence on the Indian mind.

1. Barth, *The Religions of India*, p. 155f.



## VAISNAVA PANTHEON

*Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu*

The Vaiṣṇava religion revolves round the worship of the supreme god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu and his numerous manifestations. The epics and the Purāṇas do not differentiate between Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, both the names designate the same god who is considered highest by his worshippers, described variously as the Bhāgavatas, Pañcarātras, Ekāntins, Sāttvatas and Vaiṣṇavas. The last-mentioned worshippers are named only thrice<sup>1</sup> in the *Mahābhārata* in a very late passage, but frequently in the Purāṇas. Similarly, the *Mahābhārata* generally speaks of the deity as Nārāyaṇa, the application of his other name 'Viṣṇu' being comparatively rare.<sup>2</sup> It follows that the predominance of the Viṣṇu element in a religion which came to be known as Vaiṣṇava is a later development, and in the beginning Nārāyaṇa was the deity *par excellence*.

Nārāyaṇa is a non-Vedic divinity mentioned for the first time in two passages<sup>3</sup> of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. In the first he is described as having sent forth from the place of sacrifice the Vasus, the Rudras, and the Ādityas by means of morning, midday and evening offerings, he alone remaining in the place. Prajāpati asked him to sacrifice again; and by means of sacrifice Nārāyaṇa placed himself in all the worlds, the gods, the Vedas, the vital airs, etc.; and all things were placed in him. The same idea is expressed differently in

1. *Mbh.*, XVIII. 6. 97 ; 6. 98 ; 6. 103.

2. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 49.

3. *Śat. Br.*, XII. 3. 4. If ; XIII, 6. If.



the other passage which states that by performing the *pañcarātra-sattra*, or the five-day sacrifice, Nārāyaṇa gained superiority over all beings, and became identical with all beings. The *Puruṣa-sūkta* is said to his litany.<sup>1</sup> This shows that already at the time of the composition of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* Nārāyaṇa was a deity of considerable eminence.

Attempts are made to trace the original meaning and source of the term Nārāyaṇa, and it is held<sup>2</sup> that it is a gotra name derived from Nara, analogous to Kāṇvāyana, Kātyāyana and similar formations. Thus, according to this view, Nārāyaṇa was a defied sage born in the family of another sage Nara. Nara and Nārāyaṇa were advocates of solar worship, which led to their identification with the Sun-god Viṣṇu in course of time. This interpretation of the terms completely ignores the fact that in the *Mahābhārata* the sage Nara is born out of the austerities performed by Nārāyaṇa and not vice versa. Nor is there a shred of evidence to show that Nara or Nārāyaṇa ever preached the worship of the Sun; the earliest source mentioning Nārāyaṇa, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, speaks of him as a god and not a human being. No doubt it describes him as Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa, but the epithet stands here for the Primeval Man, who was considered as much divine as any of the gods, and is described in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* hymn as the thousand-headed, thousand-eyed male. The argument<sup>3</sup>, that the human character of Nārāyaṇa is implied in the passage which states that Nārāyaṇa gained transcendence and immanence after performing the sacrifice, does not stand scrutiny, for even Prajāpati-Brahmā and Brahmā-Svayambhū are described as having acquired their powers through sacrifice in this work<sup>4</sup>, and the divine character of these deities can hardly be questioned. The view representing Nārāyaṇa as “an ancient leader of thought” dedicated to the Sun-worship is just an instance of the euhemeristic tendency, repeatedly exhibited in the study of Indian religions, which leads to far-fetched rationalisations and reconstructions of wrong history with no sound justification.

According to another opinion<sup>5</sup> Nārāyaṇa is a deity of Dravidian origin, his name being a composite of three Dravidian

1. *Ibid.*, XIII. 6. 2. 12 ; SBE, XLIV, p. 410.

2. Barnett, *The Hindu Gods and Heroes*, pp. 76-8 ; D. C. Sircar, AIU, p. 437.

3. S.N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. III, p. 12.

4. *Śat. Br.*, III. 9. 1. 4f ; XIII. 7. 1. 1.

5. L.B. Kenny, ABORI, XXIII, 1942, pp. 250-6.



words *nār-ay-an*. The first part *nār* is equated with Dravidian *nīr*, meaning 'water', and *ay* means 'to lie in a place'. With the addition of the Dravidian male personal termination *an*, it is argued, the name was applied to the male deity who was supposed to lie or reside on waters. A famous verse<sup>1</sup> of the *Mahābhārata*, which recurs with slight variations in the *smṛtis* and the *Purāṇas*<sup>2</sup>, states that Waters are known as *Nārā*, since they are the offsprings of Nara. As the Waters are the resting place of the supreme being, he is described as *Nārāyaṇa*. It is contended that this rather forced attempt to explain *Nārā* as Waters, and the fanciful etymology of the word *Nārāyaṇa*, indicate that the word and the deity are of non-Sanskṛt, Dravidian origin. However, we may point out that this view does not explain how *nīr* was changed into *nār* involving the substitution of the vowel *ī* by *ā*; and hence it is as unconvincing as the *Mahābhārata* etymology. It seems to suffer from a pre-conceived notion that the name must refer to the conception of the deity as lying on waters as suggested by the *Mahābhārata* verse. But the poet of the *Mahābhārata* seems to have taken particular delight in inventing fanciful derivations of the names of the deities, and any reliance on them may be quite misleading.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Mahābhārata* refers to another less known connotation of the word. A passage of the *Udyoga Parva*<sup>4</sup> and of the *Nārāyaṇīya*<sup>5</sup> states that the godhead is the refuge of all men, and so he is known as *Nārāyaṇa*. R. G. Bhandarkar<sup>6</sup> points out that Medhātithi commenting upon *Manu* explains the word in a similar fashion ; so *Nārāyaṇa* should mean the resting place or goal (*ayana*) of *nāra* or a collection of *narāḥ* i.e. men. We may add that a passage<sup>7</sup> of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* which identifies *Brahmā* with *Nārāyaṇa* states that *Brahmā* is known as *Nārāyaṇa*, for he is the place of eternal sleep of men (*narāṇām*). Thus *Nārāyaṇa* seems to be a combination of two words *nāra* and *ayana*. In the Vedic literature

1. *Mbh.*, XII. 328.35.

2. Cf. *Msm.*, I. 10 ; *Mārka. Pu.*, IV. 43 ; XLVII.5 ; *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, I.5.135 ; 6.57.

3. See *infra*.

4. *Mbh.*, V. 68. 10.

5. *narāṇāmayanam khyātamahamekaḥ sanātanaḥ*, *Mbh.*, XII. 328.35.

6. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, pp. 42-3.

7. *narāṇām svāpanam brahmā tasmānnārāyaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ*. *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, I. 4. 27.



*ayana* is used in the sense of 'going', 'a path' or 'road'. Evidently, just as Nāḍāyana formed from Naḍa under a sūtra of Pāṇini<sup>1</sup> signifies the gotra or the place where a collection of Naḍas go<sup>2</sup>, Nārāyana means the place where *narāḥ* go. In other words we may say that Nārāyana stands for the collective entity of man, Nara for the individual. The intrinsic and inseparable relation of Nārāyana with Nara, the Man, gave rise to the epic myth of Nara and Nārāyana being constant associates and companions. It is further indicated by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which identifies him with Puruṣa, the Primeval Man, and describes him as Puruṣa-Nārāyana. The text narrates that Puruṣa-Nārāyana conceived the idea of the *pañcarātra-sattra* with a desire to overpass all beings and become everything here on the universe, and this five-days sacrificial session is described as the Puruṣamedha, the immolation of man.<sup>3</sup> Although the gigantic array of human victims listed in this text suggests that the sacrifice had by now become symbolical, the passage undoubtedly discloses Nārāyana's connection with the institution of human-sacrifice. The ritual killing of man was a universal development from cannibalism through which human civilisation had to progress, and Nārāyana's connection with it indicates his hoary antiquity. It throws interesting light on the pristine form of Nārāyana, for if Nārāyana signified the collectivity of man, it was for the good of the whole tribe that a human being was killed, originally to provide food<sup>4</sup> for the entire community of men, and later for ritual purposes. The communal character of the sacrifice is still retained in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which states that it was a *sattra*, a communal sacrifice in which there are no priests, the performers (*yajamānas*) themselves acting as sacrificial priests.<sup>5</sup> The genesis of Nārāyana appears to have had a sound material basis and may be traced to a state of savagery; the concept changed with the progress of civilisation, and what denoted the totality of the tribe, when divorced from the conditions which gave rise to the idea, came to signify a god who not only embodied all that was here in this universe, but also transcended it.

1. Pā., IV. 1. 99.

2. Bhandarkar, *op. cit.*

3. *sa etam pañcarātram puruṣamedham yajñakratumapaśyat. Śat. Br., XIII. 6.1f*; SBE, Vol. XLIV, p. 403.

4. *medha* literally means 'food', hence Puruṣamedha = 'human-food'. See SBE, XLIV, p. 407.

5. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, Vol. II, pt. ii, p. 1241.



However, some trace of the original association of Nārāyaṇa with the human-sacrifice is preserved in the ritual of Nārāyaṇa-bali described in some Gṛhya-Sūtras.<sup>1</sup> It is stated that the rite of Nārāyaṇa-bali, literally, an offering to Nārāyaṇa, should be performed for those who die an unnatural death, commit suicide, or are slain and for all those persons for whom cremation is forbidden. It was especially ordained for those who committed the five kinds of great crimes (*mahāpātakāḥ*).<sup>2</sup> We know that even in the Middle Ages the victims of human-sacrifice were criminals, and theoretically it was held that the execution of a criminal cleansed his soul of the guilt.<sup>3</sup> In our opinion, the rite of Nārāyaṇa-bali is a remnant of some earlier ritual in which human beings were unnaturally put to death in honour of Nārāyaṇa, and the victims, generally the breakers of tribal law or outsiders, were not cremated. At any rate the connection of Nārāyaṇa with the Puruṣa-medha referred to in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* strongly suggests this interpretation. We may contrast it with the rite of Viṣṇu-bali<sup>4</sup>, which is to be performed in the eighth month of pregnancy to facilitate easy delivery. Although some texts, while mentioning the two rites, do not distinguish between the gods Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, there is never a confusion between the ceremonies of Nārāyaṇa-bali and Viṣṇu-bali, which denote two different things, and are indicative of the original character of the gods. Thus whereas the Viṣṇu-bali manifests Viṣṇu's connection with fertility, the Nārāyaṇa-bali points to the connection of Nārāyaṇa with the ritual of human-sacrifice.

The conception of Nārāyaṇa as a god embodying the whole universe is a logical development from the earlier meaning denoting 'the dwelling-place, or a resort of a collection of men'. The idea of a universal form (*viśvarūpa* or *virāṭarūpa*) of the god popularised by the *Gītā* appears to have been originally associated with Nārāyaṇa, and it is contended<sup>5</sup> that a prototype of the cosmic form of the god shown to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā* may be found in the *Āraṇyaka Parva*<sup>6</sup> of the *Mahābhārata*, which narrates the myth of

1. Baudh. Gr. Śsū., III. 20; 21; Vai., Sm. Sū., X.9; The Āśvalāyana Gṛhya-pari-śiṣṭam, III.15; Viṣṇudh. (II. 76.20) refers to it.

2. Msm., XI. 55.

3. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 336.

4. Baudh. Gr. Sū., I. 10. 13-17; Vai. Sm. Sū., III.13; for some other references see Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, Vol. II, pt. i, 196; 226.

5. Kosambi, JBBRAS, Vol. XXIV-XXV, 1948-49, p. 124f.

6. Mbh., III. 186. 39f.



sage Mārkaṇḍeya's entry into the mouth of Nārāyaṇa and presents his vision of the whole universe as existing inside the body of the deity. It is rightly argued<sup>1</sup> that the god of the *Gītā* is neither Viṣṇu nor Vāsudeva among the Vṛṣṇis, for both are cited as a special case. The godhead says<sup>2</sup> that he is manifested as Viṣṇu among the Ādityas, and as Vāsudeva among the Vṛṣṇis, just as he is Śaṅkara among the Rudras, Kapila among the Siddhas, Prahlāda among the Daityas, and so on. We may point out that these verses are referred to by Āryadeva, a Buddhist scholar of the second century A.D., who attributes these utterances to the god Nārāyaṇa.<sup>3</sup> As we have argued earlier<sup>4</sup>, the *Bhagavadgītā* forms an intrinsic part of the *Mahābhārata*; so the *bhagavat* (blessed lord) of the *Gītā*, which is also known as *Nārāyaṇīyāgītā*<sup>5</sup>, could be no other than Nārāyaṇa. The non-mention of Nārāyaṇa in the poem does not mean anything. For the poet of the *Gītā*, *bhagavat* meant Nārāyaṇa, and any clarification was unnecessary. The *Bhagavadgītā* attributes the qualities of Nārāyaṇa to Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, for one of the main tasks of the poet of the reoriented epic is to establish the identity between Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.<sup>6</sup>

Much has been written about the terms *bhagavat*, *bhakti* and 'Bhāgavata', but the scholars have invariably failed to trace the source and original significance of these words and to explain how these acquired the sense current in the epics and later literature. It is generally held that 'Bhāgavata' was originally a designation of the worshippers of the Vṛṣṇi-hero Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and the concept of the *bhagavat* arose among his worshippers. Thus the Bhāgavatas are distinguished from the worshippers of Nārāyaṇa<sup>7</sup>. According to a divergent suggestion<sup>8</sup> *bhagavat* was originally a title of the Buddha, and the followers of Viṣṇu borrowed it from Buddhism and applied it to their own deity. In our opinion both the views begin with a wrong premise, and we shall try to prove that these terms were

1. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

2. *Bhg.*, X. 21f.

3. Appendix B.

4. *Supra*, chap. 2.

5. P.C. Roy, in the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, Vol. X, p. 600, f. n.

6. *Supra*, chap. 2.

7. Mrinal Dasgupta, *IHQ*, VI, p. 665; D.C. Sircar, *The Classical Age*, p. 419; S.K. De, *Our Heritage*, Vol. I, p. 4f; R.C. Hazra, *St. Up.*, p. 14; 216; *Pu. Rec.*, p. 198.

8. Kosambi, *ISIH*, p. 245.



originally associated with Nārāyaṇa, who was the true and the original *bhagavat*. The terms *bhagavat*, *bhakta*, *bhakti* and 'Bhāgavata' are derived from the root *bhaj*, which in its earliest use in the Vedic literature means to 'divide', 'distribute', 'allot', 'share with', or 'partake of'.<sup>1</sup> It is never used in the sense of 'to adore', or 'to serve', which is the usual meaning of the verb and its various formations in later works. Similarly *bhaga* in the *Ṛgveda* meant 'wealth', 'share', a 'lucky share'.<sup>2</sup> With the addition of the affix *vat*, denoting 'possession', the term would mean 'possessed of material wealth', just as *rūpavat* means, possessed of beauty.<sup>3</sup> In the *Maitri Upaniṣad* food is called *bhagavat* Viṣṇu, and this is the earliest use of the *bhagavat* in conjunction with Viṣṇu. The term *bhakti* is closely related with the *bhagavat*, and it originally denoted<sup>4</sup> 'a portion' or 'share' and *bhakta* that which was 'assigned', 'allotted', or 'distributed'. In its extended meaning *bhakta* came to imply not merely the wealth which was distributed but also the individual who had been distributed or allotted his share of wealth. That is why in early uses *bhakti* and *bhakta* have a passive sense referring to the thing one belongs to or is partial to.<sup>5</sup> Thus if *bhagavat*, the possessor of the *bhaga* was Nārāyaṇa, the collective entity of the tribe, *bhaga* was the individual member who belonged to the *bhagavat* and received a share of the *bhaga*. At this primitive stage the communal wealth was identical with food, and that is why even in its early uses *bhakta* means 'meal'. When the culture, in which the concepts of the *bhagavat* and Nārāyaṇa originated, reached an agricultural stage, rice became the principal meal of the community and *bhakta* became synonymous with 'boiled rice'. Later, with the advance in civilisation, the title *bhagavat* was applied to the deities, who were conceived of as possessors of material wealth, and who could share it with their worshippers. Hopkins quotes a *Ṛgvedic* hymn<sup>6</sup>, where the term *bhagavat* is applied to an owner of the *bhaga*, who by implication is also the giver. The prayer is addressed to the god Bhaga, who is described as *bhagavān*, and it is invoked that

1. S.v. *bhaj*, MW, SED.

2. S.v. *bhaga*, MW, SED.

3. S.v. *vat*, Apte, SED.

4. Cf. *Nirukta* VII. 8. Yāska speaks of morning libations as *agni-bhaktinī*, the shares of Agni.

5. Pā., IV. 3.95.

6. *RV*, X, 60.5, quoted by Hopkins, *JRAS*, 1911, p. 736.



through him the worshippers too may become *bhagavantah*, that is, the possessors of wealth. Thus in the *Rgveda bhagavat* is a general term applied both to gods and to men in the sense of the 'owner of material wealth', and we agree with Hopkins that initially the term was applied to man, because his blessed state was conceived of as a portion or share given to him "by the power that has and shares portions out (Bhaga as god)".<sup>1</sup> However, the identical development of the concepts of the *bhagavat* and Nārāyaṇa coupled with the evidence of the later texts, which describe him as the *bhagavat* and his worshippers as Bhāgavatas, strongly suggests that the ideas of *bhagavat* and *bhakti* arose among the worshippers of Nārāyaṇa, and his worshippers were known as the Bhāgavatas. A passage of the *Śānti Parva* describes the supreme deity Nārāyaṇa, who is identical with Viṣṇu, as *bhagavān* endowed with six attributes<sup>2</sup>, but states that Keśava, another name of the Vṛṣṇi hero, is only one-eighth portion of the *bhagavān*.<sup>3</sup> This shows that, for the poet of the *Mahābhārata*, *bhagavān* was an epithet of the supreme god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. The term is often applied to other gods, and to men too<sup>4</sup>, but, as the Gupta inscriptions show<sup>5</sup>, when used as a noun and not as an adjective the word invariably means Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. Patañjali mentions Śiva-Bhāgavatas.<sup>6</sup> We may contend that the only god whose popularity and prestige was as well established as of Śiva, and who was a fitting counterpart of Śiva and was no less older than him, was Nārāyaṇa, and his Bhāgavata worshippers did not need a qualifying epithet to distinguish them, for they were the true and original Bhāgavatas. When the cult of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva was associated and absorbed into that of Nārāyaṇa, the worshippers of these deities also came to be known as the Bhāgavatas.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

2. For the explanation of these attributes, D.C. Sircar in AIU, p. 447.

3. *Mbh.*, XII. 271. 59-61.

4. For the use of the *bhagavat* as an honorific for sages, see V. V. Sovani, 'The Translation of the Term Bhagavat', JRAS, 1910, p. 865. The Mathura pillar inscription of Candragupta II applies the epithet to some Śaiva teachers. See Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 270, lines 5-7 of the ins.

5. Cf. Fleet, CII, III, No. 27. The records of the Bhāgavata rulers begin with a simple invocation to the *bhagavat*, who is evidently no other than Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. Cf. Poona Copp. Pl. Ins. of Prabhāvatī-guptā, (Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 411 ; Penukonḍā Copp. Pl. Ins. of Mādhava (*ibid.*, p. 456).

6. On Pā., V. 2.76, *Mahā.*, Vol. II, p. 387



The inscriptions of the second-first century B.C. connect the Bhāgavatas with the worship of Vāsudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa.<sup>1</sup>

The *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* describes the worshippers of the supreme deity Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva as Sāttvatas, Bhāgavatas, Pañcarātras and Ekāntins. The term Sāttvata was originally the name of a Vṛṣṇi-clan among whom Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was born, and his worship originated among them. Later, when his cult spread to other communities, the ethnic name of his clansmen became a general designation of his worshippers.<sup>2</sup> The word 'Ekāntin' indicating absolute and exclusive devotion to a particular deity was coined by the devotees of Nārāyaṇa to contradistinguish them from the followers of Vāsudeva, who was worshipped with his associate members, and in a passage of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the superiority of the Ekāntins over such worshippers of Puruṣottama, that is, Vāsudeva, is clearly established.<sup>3</sup> The remaining two applications, the Bhāgavata and the Pañcarātras, are connected genetically with Nārāyaṇa, the former with his conception as the *bhagavat* and the latter with his *pañcarātra sattrā*. The interpretation of the word

1. The Besnagar Garuḍa-pillar ins. of the time of Bhāgabhadra, Sircar, *Sel., Ins.*, pp. 90-1; and the Ghosunḍī ins., of the king Sarvatāta, *ibid.*, pp. 91-2.
2. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* states that the supreme god is worshipped by the sacrificers as Yajña-puruṣa, by the Sāttvatas as Vāsudeva, and by the Vedāntins as Viṣṇu. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 17.15.
3. *aho hyekāntinaḥ sarvānprīṇāti bhagavānhariḥ  
vidhiprayuktām pūjām ca grhṇāti bhagavānsvayam  
ye tu dagdhendhanā loke puṇyapāpavivarjitāḥ  
teṣāṃ tvyābhiniṛdiṣṭā pāramparyāgatā gatiḥ.  
caturthyām caiva te gatyām gacchanti puruṣottamam  
ekāntinastu puruṣā gacchanti paramam padam.  
nūnamekāntadharmoyam śreṣṭho nārāyaṇapriyaḥ* Mbh., XII. 336. I-4a.

There is no doubt that here Puruṣottama refers to Vāsudeva. In the *Vai. Sm. Sū.* the brāhmaṇas are required to bless the newly-married husband with the following :

*manur-iva mahādhikāro bhava  
prajāpatir-iva suprajā bhava  
puruṣottama-iva durjayo bhava  
mahendra-iva sarvārthasamsiddho bhava.*

"Be of great authority as Manu. Be rich in progeny as Prajāpati. Be invincible as Puruṣottama. Be perfected in all respects as Mahendra." (*Vai. Sm. Sū.* III. 4.4.). Apparently in this benedictory phrase also Puruṣottama stands for Vāsudeva, who was invincible. The Ghosunḍī inscription of Sarvatāta also describes Vāsudeva as *anihata*, the Unconquered. Kosambi suggests that the epithet Puruṣottama was borrowed by the followers of Vaiṣṇavism from Buddhism (ISIH, p. 245). But this is not at all certain, Vāsudeva, the Invincible, whose conquests are famous both in the Jaina and the brāhmaṇical sources, may have been from the very beginning thought of as the best of men.



*pañcarātra* has proved a baffling problem, and it will be worthwhile to discuss it at some detail.

Pañcarātra as a name of the worshippers of Nārāyaṇa occurs for the first time in the *Nārāyaṇīya* only, and the section also speaks of Nārāyaṇa as *pañcarātri*.<sup>1</sup> Apparently the epithet should mean the performer of the *pañcarātra* sacrifice mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and this indicates the source from which the designation of his devotees is derived. Several scholars have attempted to explain the term, basing their arguments on the authority of the extant Pañcarātra literature; but as the Pañcarātra Saṃhitās and other sacred works of this class are themselves very much confused about the real meaning of the word and contain contradictory statements, the result is a confusion worse confounded. Thus according to the *Nārada Pañcarātra*<sup>2</sup>, *rātra* means knowledge; hence Pañcarātra is a system which deals with five kinds of knowledge, cosmology (*tattva*), the science of liberation (*muktiprāda*), of devotion (*bhaktiprāda*), of yoga (*yaugika*), and pertaining to senses (*vaiśeṣika*). But, as is pointed out<sup>3</sup>, few of the extant saṃhitās conform to this scheme of the topics outlined, and the apocryphal nature of the text renders its evidence highly untrustworthy. According to the *Īśvara Saṃhitā*<sup>4</sup> the religion that was taught by the god to five sages, Śāṇḍilya, Aupagāyana, Mauñjāyana, Kauśika and Bhāradvāja, in five successive days and nights came to be known among the people as Pañcarātra. The *Śrī-Praśna Saṃhitā* states that *rātri* means nescience (*ajñānam*), and *pañca* derived from the root *pac* means that which cooks or destroys, hence Pañcarātra is the system which destroys ignorance.<sup>5</sup> According to the *Padma Tantra*<sup>6</sup> the system is so named because, just as the sun dispels the night, the Pañcarātra dispels the other five systems, which are the Yoga, sāmkhya, Buddhism, Jainism and Pāśupata. Of such speculations, a verse pointed out<sup>7</sup> in a Tantric text<sup>8</sup> of the sixteenth century A. D. provides the most fantastic example. It states

1. *Mbh.*, XII. 325.4.

2. *Nārada Pañcarātra*, I. 1.44.

3. Schrader, *Intro. Pañca.*, p. 24.

4. *Īśvara Saṃhitā*, XXI. 579. 532, quoted by B. Bhattacharya, Forward to the *Jayā Sam.*, p. 9.

5. *Śrī Praśna-Saṃhitā*, II. 40, quoted by Govindacharya Swamin, JRAS, 1911, p. 940.

6. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 941.

7. B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

8. *Śaktisaṅgama Tantra*, quoted by B. Bhattacharya, *ibid.*



that the Pañcarātras are designated as such, because their faith enjoins them not to see a Śaiva for five successive nights. This may be a case of wilful misinterpretation, but even the other definitions mentioned in the Pañcarātra texts clearly show that the Pañcarātras themselves no longer remembered the real significance of the term.

On the basis of a passage<sup>1</sup> mentioned in the *Agni Purāṇa*, which states that the five elements (*pañcabhūtāḥ*) forming the body of Brahmā are known as *pañcarātra*, T.P. Bhattacharya and, following him, R. C. Hazra contend<sup>2</sup> that the term *rātra* originally denoted 'element' and those persons who regarded the creation to consist of the five elements were described as Pañcarātras, those who considered it to be of seven elements, as Saptarātras, and so on. However, Bhattacharya also conjectures<sup>3</sup> a little earlier in the same work that the reverence shown to the five Vṛṣṇi heroes, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Sāmba and Aniruddha, may have been the reason why the cult was known as Pañcarātra. We fail to understand how he reconciles his two views unless it is presumed that the hero-gods were presiding deities of the five elements, which is nowhere mentioned in any Pañcarātra text. At any rate it is not shown how *rātra* could signify either 'element' or 'deity'.<sup>4</sup> We may point out a passage<sup>5</sup> in the *Parama Samhitā*, an early Pañcarātra text of high authority<sup>6</sup>, which gives an explanation similar to that of the *Agni Purāṇa*. It states that the five primary elements (*pañcamahābhūtāḥ*), the subtle elements (*tanmātrāḥ*), individuation (*ahamkāram*), mind (*buddhi*) and unmanifest (*avyakta*), these five things are the *rātra* (the body, or the gifts ?) of Puruṣa, and are described as Pañcarātra. Both the definitions, in our opinion, are arbitrary explanations invented by the Pañcarātras to account for their name, when the original sense was long forgotten.

Since the *Ahirbdhnya Samhitā* is one of the earliest Pañcarātra works, several scholars have accepted the explanation of the term given in it as most authentic and authoritative. The *Samhitā* states<sup>7</sup>

1. *Agni Purāṇa*, XXIX. 7.

2. T.P. Bhattacharya, JBRS, Vol. XL, 1954, p. 368f ; 373. Hazra, introduction to Wilson's translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, II ed., p.c.

3. T.P. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 365.

4. For further criticism see R.S. Sharma, A review of *The Cult of Brahmā*, JBRS, 1957, p. 392.

5. *Parama Samhitā*, I. 39-41.

6. S.K. Aiyanger, *Parama Samhitā*, Intro., pp. 26-7.

7. *Ahir. Sam.*, XI. 64-6.



that the system which recognises the fivefold forms of the deity, the *para* (transcendent), *vyūha* (emanatory), *vibhava* (incarnatory), *antaryāmin* (immanent) and *arcā* (that which resides in idols and images) forms, is known as Pañcarātra. In the opinion of Schrader this is the original significance of the term<sup>1</sup>, and he is followed by several scholars.<sup>2</sup> According to this view those who believed in the fivefold manifestation of the god came to be known as Pañcarātrins, and it is held<sup>3</sup> that the doctrine is evolved in an effort to explain the *pañcarātra sattrā* of Nārāyaṇa. A restatement of this argument would be that the worshippers of Nārāyaṇa tried to interpret the *pañcarātra sattrā*, and thus developed the principle of the five forms of the deity, and because they believed in this doctrine they were described as Pañcarātras. However, we may point out that the *vyūha* theory evolved sometime in the first-second century A.D.<sup>4</sup>, and the doctrine of incarnation also was in a formative stage during this period. It follows logically that the name Pañcarātra was applied to the worshippers of Nārāyaṇa only when these doctrines were well formulated and arranged into a consistent system, but the *Nārāyaṇīya*, which mentions for the first time a religious cult known as Pañcarātra, shows no acquaintance with the systematised theory of the five forms of the deity, nor is it given any prominence in other Pañcarātra works. If the tenet was so important and fundamental as to have given its name to the sect, it would certainly have received greater emphasis in the Pañcarātra works, particularly in those which are of the same date or even earlier than the *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā*, such as the *Sāttvata Saṃhitā* and the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*.<sup>5</sup> In our opinion the concept of the fivefold nature of the deity is a later systematisation when the Pañcarātra philosophy had already reached a high state of development.

It is curious that most of the explanations put forward for the term *pañcarātra* deal with its secondary connotations, and invariably ignore the primary sense. Thus one scholar conjectures<sup>6</sup> that the word *pañcarātra* was derived from the fact that the original followers

1. Schrader, *Intro. Pañca.*, p. 25.

2. B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 9; B. Kumarappa, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity*, p. 91.

3. S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 537; B. Kumarappa, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-1.

4. *Supra*, chap. 2.

5. *Ibid.*

6. V. Rangacharya, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, p. 70.



of the cult sacrificed, or observed some other ritual, according to the five seasons of the year ; but no attempt is made to explain how *rātra* can be equated to “season”. The term *pañcarātra* could connote ‘five knowledges’, ‘five elements’, ‘five deities’, ‘five forms of a deity’ or ‘five seasons of the year’ only through usage, by its constant application to the same set of ideas, but initially it must have been applied in its original significance only.<sup>1</sup> All this confusion about the true and initial meaning of the term is caused by ignoring the obvious. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* clearly states<sup>2</sup> that the *pañcarātra sattrā* of Nārāyaṇa was the Puruṣamedha or human-sacrifice which lasted for five days ; the duration of the sacrifice being counted from the previous night, the word *rātra* is used.<sup>3</sup> In the *Vaitāna Sūtra* of the *Atharvaveda* also the human-sacrifice is a five-day performance.<sup>4</sup> Thus it seems that Pañcarātra originally meant human-sacrifice with which Nārāyaṇa was connected. With the progress of civilisation the character of Nārāyaṇa changed, and the ritual killing of man was abandoned, but the name clung to the followers of Nārāyaṇa, the highest and the oldest of gods<sup>5</sup>, and it is in this sense that it is used in the *Mahābhārata*.

Although both the terms ‘Bhāgavata’ and ‘Pañcarātra’ designate the followers of the syncretistic deity Nārāyaṇa in general, some texts seem to make a distinction between the two, which has contributed to the prevalent view<sup>6</sup> that initially the Pañcarātras only were the votaries of Nārāyaṇa, and that the Bhāgavatas were devotees of Vāsudeva ; and hence Vāsudeva was the real and original *bhagavat*. It is also suggested<sup>7</sup> that the Bhāgavatas worshipped Vāsudeva as identified with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, and his incarnations, and the Pañcarātras worshipped him in his four vyūha forms, Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. But in our opinion the

1. Schrader, (*Intro. Pañca.*, p. 24, f.n.1) in defence of the definition given in the *Nārada Pañcarātra*, quotes the example of the book *Thousand And One Nights*, which is understood as, as many stories. However, we may point out that in this case also the secondary meaning is obtained only because the stories refer to the happenings of one thousand and one nights.

2. *Śat. Br.*, XIII, 6.1.7 and 9 ; SBE, XLIV, p. 405.

3. Cf. *dvādaśarātra*, *ekaṣaṣṭhirātra*.

4. J. Eggeling, SBE, XLIV, intro. p. xxxiii, f.n.1.

4. The *Mahābhārata* speaks of him as *purveṣāmappi pūrvajāḥ*. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 113.

5. *Supra*, p. 37, f.n. 7.

6. Bagchi, *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 402 ; V.S. Agrawala, *Harṣacarita eka adhyayana*, pp. 109 f ; 191 ; V.S. Pathak, JUPHS, XXIV-XXV, 1951-52, p. 209 f.



difference between the Bhāgavatas and the Pañcarātras does not lie in the fact that they were originally devoted to two different gods, or two different groups of divinities, but in their social basis. R.P. Chanda<sup>1</sup> quoted two passages ascribed to the *Kūrma Purāṇa* and the *Sāmba Purāṇa* which mention the Bhāgavatas and the Pañcarātras separately and denounce them as non-Vedic. The passage from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* states that the Vaidikas (followers of the Vedic religion) should never think of the Pañcarātra, Bhāgavata, Buddhist, Digambara, Kāpāla, Pāśupata, Lākula, Bhairava, and left-handed Śākta systems for these are against the Vedas. The *Harṣacarita* of Bāṇa also enumerates them separately<sup>2</sup>, and the commentator on the *Harṣacarita* explains the former as worshippers of Viṣṇu (*vaiṣṇava-bhaktāḥ*), and the latter as a sect of the Vaiṣṇavas (*vaiṣṇava-bheda*).<sup>3</sup> On the basis of these and such passages, it is wrong to hold that the Bhāgavatas and the Pañcarātras worshipped different divinities, for the Pañcarātra Saṁhitās such as the *Jayākhyā Saṁhitā* and the *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṁhitā* equally enjoin the worship of the vyūha and of the incarnations, and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which are supposed to be the Bhāgavata scriptures, eulogise also the vyūha forms of the deity and sanction all forms of his worship.<sup>4</sup> The main difference between the Bhāgavatas and the Pañcarātras seems to lie in the fact that whereas the Bhāgavata devotees of Nārāyaṇa had accepted the brāhmaṇical social order, the Pañcarātras were indifferent to and were perhaps against it. It is generally accepted that the Pañcarātras had prominent Tantric leanings<sup>5</sup> and Tantricism, on the whole, was more popular with the lower classes. Bhāgavatism, on the other hand, gained support of the ruling classes and championed the varṇa system. It may be questioned that if Bhāgavatism favoured the varṇa order, how Heliodorus, a foreigner, could embrace Bhāgavatism in the second century B.C. But the advocacy of the cause of the varṇa did not mean exclusion of foreigners from Bhāgavatism. The varṇa system, as conceived by its supporters, was a universal principle created by God, and it embraced the entire

1. R.P. Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races*, pt. i, p. 100.

2. *Harṣacarita*. VIII. 235f.

3. D.C. Sircar, JRASBL, XI, 1943, p. 232.

4. Cf. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 18.58 ; *Bhā. Pu.*, XII. 11 21 ; also see D.C. Sircar, *op. cit.*

5. Chintaharan Chakravarti, *The Tantras, Studies on Their Religion and Literature*, p. 57.



humanity. Those who did not conform to it were merely degraded members of the one varṇa or the other ; and they could be purified and restored to the full-fledged membership of their varṇa by worshipping god Viṣṇu.<sup>1</sup> So there was nothing incongruous in the fact that the Greek ambassador Heliodorus, a member of the ruling class, should proudly declare himself a Bhāgavata. In fact, Bhāgavatism was largely responsible for the absorption and adjustment of foreigners in the contemporary Indian society. The Pañcarātras, on the other hand, showed no respect to the varṇa rules, and their initiation was open to all with no distinctions of caste and sex. It is only gradually that varṇa distinctions creep in into the Pañcarātra rituals, more and more corresponding to the lateness of the texts in which they are described. Still the Vaidikas denounced both the systems, the Bhāgavata and the Pañcarātra, for both were based on the worship of a non-Vedic divinity. But the evidence of the passages quoted from the *Harṣacarita* and the Purāṇas does not go against our contention that the Bhāgavatas also, like the Pañcarātras, were from the very beginning associated with the worship of Nārāyaṇa and hence the *bhagavat* could be no other than Nārāyaṇa.

It is difficult to determine whether Nārāyaṇa was an Āryan or non-Āryan deity, for although he is not mentioned in the Vedas, it is possible that his worship was popular among the Āryans who were outside the Vedic circle. Much depends on the determination of the problem whether the root *nṛ*, from which the words *nara* and Nārāyaṇa are formed, is of Āryan origin or derived from some non-Āryan source. It is suggested that the [name and the god may be traced to the Indus valley civilisation, and that some features of Nārāyaṇa correspond to the Sumerian god Ea or Enki, who sleeps in a chamber in the midst of waters, just as Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu does on the serpent Śeṣa.<sup>2</sup> We may add that the history of the words *bhagavat* and *bhakta* suggests that the society, in which these terms evolved, was based on a strong agricultural economy where rice was the staple diet. Perry has shown<sup>3</sup> that in the archaic civilisation the ritual of human sacrifice was associated with agriculture, and we have already discussed in detail Nārāyaṇa's unmistakable connection

1. *Infra*.

2. Kosambi, ISIH, p. 111 ; JESHO, IV, p. 210.

3. W.J. Perry, *The Origin of Magic and Religion*, 121-2 ; also see Perry's *The Children of the Sun*, p. 215. quoted by S.K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess*, p. 9.



with this ritual. Further, the *Mahābhārata* connects<sup>1</sup> Nārāyaṇa with the Śrāddha ceremony (funeral rite performed in honour of the departed spirits of dead relatives), and the rite of Nārāyaṇa-bali also is developed into a kind of the Śrāddha. In both these rituals the offerings of black sesamum (tilāñjali) is an essential rite, and in our opinion rituals connected with sesamum are an inheritance from the Harrappa Culture.<sup>2</sup> At any rate the view that the Bhāgavata-Pañcarātra faith was non-Vedic appears to have had wide currency ; and Yamunācārya had to refute it vehemently in his *Āgama-prāmāṇya*.<sup>3</sup> The Pañcarātra texts<sup>4</sup> themselves trace the origin of their system from the Ekāyana Śākhā of the *Rgveda* mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.<sup>5</sup> But the assumption of any connection between the Ekāyana and the Pañcarātra is quite baseless, and is evidently a fabrication of the Pañcarātras to secure orthodox sanctity for their cult. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* Nārada complains that the knowledge of Ekāyana did not help him much in the solution of his problems, but according to unanimous Pañcarātra tradition Nārada is one of the staunchest adherents of this cult.<sup>6</sup> It is held on the basis of a *Mahābhārata* passage that the Pañcarātra scriptures were originally non-Vedic and that the cult was later made consistent with the Vedic teachings.<sup>7</sup>

The cult of Nārāyaṇa discloses prominent influence of the ascetics, and it is very probable that it was dominated by them in its early stages. The *Mahābhārata* speaks of Nārāyaṇa as a great yogī and ascetic, who is constantly engaged in practising penance at Badrikāśrama with his double Nara, who was born as a result of his austerities.<sup>8</sup> The *Śānti Parva* often connects Nārāyaṇa with yogīs and yogic practices<sup>9</sup>, and describes him as a master of yoga (*yogeśvara*)<sup>10</sup>. The vision of Nārāyaṇa as beheld by Nārada in the White Island further corroborates the view that he was conceived of as an ascetic-

1. *Mbh.*, XII. 333 ; also see XII. 322. 19f.

2. *Infra*.

3. S.K. Aiyangar, *Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1939, p. 99f.

4. *Śrī-Praśna-Samhitā* and *Īśvara Samhitā*, I.43 quoted by B. Bhattacharya in the Foreword to *Jayā. Sam.*, p. 6.

5. *The Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, vii. 2.

6. K.C. Varadachari, 'The Pañcarātra Śāstra and the Upaniṣads', *New Indian Antiquary*, VIII, 1946, p. 27.

7. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 199.

8. Raychaudhuri, *EHVS*, p. 114.

9. Cf. *Mbh.*, XII. 289.62; 290.23; XII. 210.17.

10. *Ibid.*, 209.5.



god. It is stated that he appeared before Nārada holding a sacrificial altar, a water-pot (*kamaṇḍalu*), a bundle of Kuśa grass, white gems, a deer skin, a wooden staff, and a blazing fire-stick.<sup>1</sup> In the eulogy recited by Nārada the god is identified with several classes of hermits and ascetics, Haṁsa, Paramahansa, Phenapācārya, Vālakhilya, Vaikhānasa and Citraśikhaṇḍin.<sup>2</sup> The Citraśikhaṇḍin sages are also credited with the promulgation of an original treatise on the Pañcarātra.<sup>3</sup> This shows that from the very beginning the Pañcarātra was connected with ascetics. We have shown that the rite of Nārāyaṇa-bali reflects some original traits of the deity ; we may further point out that the rite is to be performed not only for those who meet some kind of unnatural death, but also for the ascetics. An inscription of the sixth century A.D., which provides for the regular performance of Nārāyaṇa-bali for ascetics etc., also makes arrangements for the regular feeding of *parivrājakas* (ascetics).<sup>4</sup> The Pañcarātra Saṁhitās put great emphasis on the attainment of knowledge<sup>5</sup> and the practice of the eightfold (*aṣṭāṅga*) yoga, which is connected with the worship of diagrams etc.,<sup>6</sup> and although the mantras and magic circles described in these works may not be of much antiquity, the emphasis on yoga and yogic practices indicates the association of the ascetics with the cult.

Nārāyaṇa is sometimes identified with Prajāpati-Brahmā. We have seen that even in the period represented by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* Nārāyaṇa was conceived of as a cosmic god ; in course of time the work of creation also was attributed to him, which apparently led to his identification with Brahmā, the creator god of brāhmaṇic mythology. The *Manu-smṛti* in its account of creation identifies Nārāyaṇa with Brahmā.<sup>7</sup> The creation legends given in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* also identify the two deities at several places.<sup>8</sup> In an interesting passage<sup>9</sup> of this Purāṇa, Brahmā in answer to the query of god

1. Ibid., 326.9.

2. Ibid., 325. 4f, Nos. 65, 66, 100, 101, 102.

3. Ibid., 322. 32; 36-8.

4. IA, III, p. 305-6; A.V. Naik, *A list of the inscriptions of the Deccan*, pp. 71-2.

5. Cf. *Jayā. Sam.*, IV. 38, 51; V. 1.

6. *Sāttvata Samhitā*, II. 2.12; Schrader, op. cit., pp. 111, 151.

7. *Msm.*, I. 10-1.

8. *Vā. Pu.*, III.38; VI.3; VII.63-5, 69.71; D.R. Patil, *Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa*, p. 64.

9. *Vā. Pu.*, XXIV. 21.



Viṣṇu expressly states that he is Nārāyaṇa, the creator of the world. The passage also indicates that the identification of Nārāyaṇa with Brahmā preceded the former's identification with Viṣṇu. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* mentions<sup>1</sup> Brahmā as one who is known as Nārāyaṇa, and goes on to attribute the Fish, the Tortoise and the Boar forms to the former. The passage seems to record the earlier tradition which ascribed these forms to Prajāpati-Brahmā.<sup>2</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* identifies Brahmā and Nārāyaṇa at three places<sup>3</sup>, and the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* speaks of him as the lord of universe who has Brahmā's own form.<sup>4</sup> Evidently Nārāyaṇa is a powerful god in his own right, which conduces to his identification first with Brahmā and next with Viṣṇu. Later, when the popularity and the prestige of Nārāyaṇa reaches its peak, Brahmā becomes a mere subordinate divinity, who is produced out of the greatest of the gods and stands on his navel.<sup>5</sup>

The paucity of material makes it very difficult to discern the process which led to Nārāyaṇa's identity with Viṣṇu, but we may point out a passage in the *Maitri Upaniṣad* which seems to foreshadow the eventual merging of the two. It identifies the soul (Ātman) with several gods enumerated as Īśāna, Śambhu, Bhava, Rudra, Prajāpati, Viśvasrj, Hiranyagarbha, Satya, Prāṇa, Haṁsa, Śāstā, Acyuta, Viṣṇu, and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>6</sup> The order of the gods suggests that Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa were closely associated, and had prominent similarities. In the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas the first four names mentioned in the passage refer to the deity Rudra-Śiva, the next three to Prajāpati-Brahmā, and the last three to the well-known names of the supreme deity of the Vaiṣṇavas. Among the early Upaniṣads the *Maitri Upaniṣad* is supposed to be one of the later ones, and it is certainly post-Buddhist.<sup>7</sup> We may assume that, just as similarity in character and attributes conduced to the amalgamation of the Vedic Rudra with the non-Vedic Śiva-Śaṅkara, a similar synthesis worked in case of Vedic Viṣṇu and non-Vedic Nārāyaṇa. In the *Mahābhārata*, the identity of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu is an

1. *Vā. Pu.*, I.4. 7-9., T.P. Bhattachary, JBRS, Vol. XLI, 1955, pp. 24-5.

2. *Infra*.

3. *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, 1.4.27; 5.140 ; 6.57.

4. *Mārka. Pu.*, XLVII. 4.

5. This iconographical conception is considered to be a mythological elaboration of a Ṛgvedic verse X.82. 5-6. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 43.

6. *Maitri Upaniṣad*, Cowell's ed. VII.7 ; TPU, p. 454. For Acyuta as an epithet of Viṣṇu in this Upaniṣad, see VI. 23; and VI. 38.

7. Macdonell, HSL, p. 230.



established fact, but the prominence of the first-mentioned name in the work may suggest that the masses, for whom the great epic was intended, had greater reverence for, or were more familiar with, the god Nārāyaṇa than Viṣṇu.<sup>1</sup>

Much is written about the Vedic god Viṣṇu and his rise to the rank of highest divinity in post-Vedic times. In the *Rgveda* only five hymns are addressed to him; his name is mentioned nearly a hundred times, and it is stated<sup>2</sup> that statistically he is a deity of the fourth rank. He often appears in the role of an assistant of Indra, and is inferior to him<sup>3</sup>, but there are indications that even in the *Rgvedic* age he was considered to be a great god<sup>4</sup>, and it is suggested that he may have been more popular among the masses whose ideas and inclinations are not recorded in the Vedas.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the scholars is of opinion that Viṣṇu represents a form of the Sun in the *Rgveda*.<sup>6</sup> But Gonda, who has recently made a detailed study of the various features of Viṣṇu, comes to the conclusion that the solar traits of the god represent only one aspect of the deity who is closely associated with vegetation and fertility, and that his principal attribute is his power to pervade and penetrate the provinces of the universe. He derives support for his argument from the traditional etymology of Viṣṇu's name<sup>7</sup> offered in the Purāṇas, which interpret it as one who enters or pervades. Earlier, R. Otto made a similar suggestion that Viṣṇu originally represented a power or *numen* dwelling in certain things, pervading and penetrating them.<sup>8</sup> Whatever may have been the original character of Viṣṇu, his importance was steadily growing in the Vedic circles. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, he is identified with the sacrifice<sup>9</sup>, and in the early Sūtra works he is an important divinity to whom oblations are offered in many

1. The popularity of Nārāyaṇa is shown by the occurrence of his name in the Buddhist works also. See the *Avadānaśataka*, I, p. 129 ; SBE, XXI, p. 397 (*Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, Chapter XXIII).
2. Keith, *Rel. Phil. Ved.*, p. 108; J.N. Banerjea, *JISOA*, XIII, 1945, p. 58.
3. Raychaudhuri, *EHVS*, p. 14.
4. Bhandarkar, *VSMRS*, p. 47 ; Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*
5. Gonda, *AEV*, p. 10f.
6. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 37f; Grierson, *IA*, 1908, p. 253f ; *ERE*, II, p. 540; Keith, *Rel. Phil. Ved.*, p. 108f ; Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 11f; J.N. Banerjea, *Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1944, p.82f; D.C. Sircar, *AIU*, p. 431.
7. Viṣṇu is derived from *viś*, to pervade, or *viś*, to enter, see Radhadkrishnan, *Bhg.*, p. 26.f. n.1; B.K.G. Shastri, *The Bhakti Cult in Ancient India*, p. 88.
8. R. Otto, *The Visva Bharati Quarterly*, I, pt. ii, p. 21. f.
9. *Śat. Br.*, I.9.3.9; D.C. Sircar, *Early History of Vaiṣṇavism*, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 110.



Śrauta and Gṛhya sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> With the rise of Buddhism the cult of Indra, becomes discredited, and Viṣṇu appropriates many myths and features of Indra.<sup>2</sup> In the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas Indra is a subordinate divinity, who can maintain his position only through the grace of Viṣṇu. His identification with Nārāyaṇa further contributed to his rise, and in the new religious movement the Viṣṇu element asserts itself fully by the fourth-fifth century A.D. The *bhagavad-rūpa* or *virāt-rupa* of the god in the *Bhagavad-gītā* becomes the *vaiṣṇava-rūpa* in the *Anugītā*; and the term *parama-vaiṣṇava*, the devout worshipper of Viṣṇu, appears for the first time on the coins of the Traikūṭaka kings. We have already mentioned that 'Vaiṣṇava' as a title of the worshipper of Viṣṇu is found only in the latest portions of the *Mahābhārata*. The shift to Viṣṇu element symbolises the complete brāhmaṇisation of the diverse trends originating from Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva and other divinities, who are fused and assimilated into Vaiṣṇavism, and its wide-spread recognition as an orthodox Vedic cult.

#### *Śaṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva*

Śaṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva appears in the *Mahābhārata* as a warrior of the Vṛṣṇis, son of Vasudeva and Rohiṇī. His connection with the *Mahābhārata* episode is very tenuous and, on the whole, his role is subservient to the will and majesty of his younger and more popular brother Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the idol of the epic poets.

Śaṅkarṣaṇa is mentioned for the first time in the *Arthaśāstra*, which states<sup>3</sup> that spies disguised as the ascetic worshippers of the god Śaṅkarṣaṇa should mix the juice of the Madana plant in the sacrificial beverage and offer it to the cowherds of the enemy. The passage does not indicate whether he was associated with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as early as the fourth century B. C., but apparently his predilection towards strong drinks was known and his devotees indulged in some kind of sacrificial drinking<sup>4</sup>, for the guise of his votaries in the opinion of Kauṭilya was particularly suited for the purpose. The Purāṇas speak of the god as a heavy drinker<sup>5</sup> with eyes rolling in a state of perpetual inebriety.

1. Ramgopal, *India of Vedic Kalpasūtras*, p. 466.

2. Gonda, op. cit., p. 122.

3. *Śaṅkarṣaṇadaivatīyogo vā muṇḍajātilavyaṇjanah pravahanaḥ karmanā madanarasayogamatisandadhyāt.* Aś, XIII. 3. 67.

4. For the partaking of spirituous liquor by *munis* and ascetics see Yaduvanshi, *Saiva mata*, pp. 7-8 ; Ghurye, *The Indian Sādhus*, pp. 17-8.

5. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 25.



The cult of Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva discloses many features of snake-worship. A *Mahubhārata* passage<sup>1</sup> speaks of a serpent Baladeva, the foremost of the nāgas who should be worshipped on the eighth of the dark-fornight of the month of Kārttika for obtaining the strength of the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. The texts<sup>2</sup> describe him as of white complexion wearing black or blue garments, and his icons are provided with a snake-canopy overhead. On the basis of the iconographical similarities between the images of Baladeva and the nāga statues Vogel asserts that the mythical character of Baladeva evolved out of a nāga deity. In his opinion the worship of the nāga Baladeva was "absorbed into Kṛṣṇaism" when the cult of Kṛṣṇa rose into prominence.<sup>3</sup> The suggestion has a good deal of plausibility. The irascible temper of Saṅkarṣaṇa Baladeva and his drinking habits are all indicative of a nāga origin. His emblem, the palmyra leaf, also points to it. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>4</sup> it is the thousand-hooded serpent Ananta who has a three pointed palmyra banner of golden colour. The banner is said to have been established by the gods on a lofty mountain in the east to mark the eastern direction. The three pronged motif is significant; it evidently denotes the nāga character of the emblem<sup>5</sup>, and the flag-staff of

1. *Mbh.*, XIII. 132. 8-11.

2. *Br. Sam.*, 57. 36; *Antagaḍa-Dasāo*, Barnett's tr., p. 7.

3. Vogel, ASIAR, 1908-9, p. 162.

4. *Rāmā.*, IV. 40. 51-4.

5. A three-horned god with three faces appears on the Indus seals. Kosambi (ISIH, pp. 84-6) suggests that the deity is, perhaps, Tvāṣṭra, the three-headed brāhmaṇa priest who was killed by Indra and Tritā Āptya (RV, X. 8). He refers to a legend in the *Avesta* which narrates the decapitation of Azi Dahāka by Thraetona Athvya. Azi is the Persian equivalent of the Sanskrit *ahi* (serpent), and Zohak, the same as Azi Dahāka, is described as having two snake heads growing out of his shoulders. In our opinion, the Avestan counterpart of the Vedic myth may suggest that Tvāṣṭra also like Azi Dahāka, had nāga affiliations; the Rgvedic story perhaps alludes to the subjection of a pre-Āryan cult by Indra and Tritā. In any case, the depiction of the three horns on the Indus seals is exactly like the conventionalised form of the symbol discussed by Rapson (*Cat. Andhra* etc., p. clxxvi). Bühler (EI, II, p. 312) and Bloch (ASIAR, 1903-4, p. 105) described it as an ornamental triśūla, but in the opinion of Coomaraswamy and J. N. Banerjea (DHI, I ed., pp. 204-5) it is the Śrīvatsa mark, one of the eight auspicious signs of the Jains (Barnett's tr. of *Antagaḍa Dasāo*, p. 48). According to the *Bṛhat Samhitā* (50.45) the god of the Jains bears a Śrīvatsa mark on his breast. D. R. Bhandarkar identified it with the jewel Kaustubha as it appears on the breast of the Viṣṇu image at Udayagiri (ASIAR, 1913-4, p. 211). The symbol frequently appears on the Jaina *āyāgapatas* (see the *āyāgapata* found at Kankali tilā, Mathura, EI, II, p. 311, pl. 1) and Buddhist monuments. Several Basarh seals bear this mark (refer to nos, 31, 35, 37, 42, 44, 135). In our opinion, it is a sacred nāga symbol which found recognition in Buddhism, Jainism, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, alike.



Baladeva also is described as three-headed.<sup>1</sup> He is regarded as an incarnation of Śeṣanāga, and it is said that a snake came out of his mouth at the time of his death.<sup>2</sup> In fact if we dissociate the nāga element from the character of Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva, hardly anything distinctive remains.

Although Saṅkarṣaṇa appears as a Vaiṣṇavite divinity in the *Mahabhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, there are traces of his close connection with the cult of Rudra-Śiva also. The *Pañcarātra Samhitās* often identify Saṅkarṣaṇa with Rudra-Śiva.<sup>3</sup> The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* states<sup>4</sup> that Rudra was known as Halāyudha, one who holds the plough as his weapon, that is, Saṅkarṣaṇa, in one of his incarnations. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>5</sup> speaks of Saṅkarṣaṇa-Rudra, who comes out of the mouth of the serpent Śeṣa at the end of every aeon (*kalpa*). The process is sometimes reversed, and the *Harivamśa* states<sup>6</sup> that Ananta, another name of Śeṣa, who is invariably identified with Saṅkarṣaṇa, was born of Śiva. The palm tree, as we have stated earlier, is associated with Saṅkarṣaṇa and appears<sup>7</sup> on the coins of the Bhāraśiva nāgas, who were the devotees of Śiva, and it is possible that the three-forked palm standard of Saṅkarṣaṇa had, in its genesis, some affinity with the trident of Śiva. We may note that the god Śiva also is intimately associated with the nāgas.

One of the prominent characteristics of Saṅkarṣaṇa is his association with agriculture. The god Śiva also is intimately associated with fertility and agriculture, and he is usually worshipped in the form of a phallic emblem. It is held<sup>8</sup> that his worship prevailed mostly among the agriculturist classes. Both Śiva and Saṅkarṣaṇa are known as *musalin*<sup>9</sup>, the wielder of the pestle, an implement for cleaning rice. However, in case of Saṅkarṣaṇa the agricultural aspect is very much emphasised, and he invariably figures as holding the two characteristically agricultural weapons, the pestle and the plough. The *Purāṇas* narrate<sup>10</sup> how the river Yamunā (Jamna) changed

1. *Mbh.*, XIII. 147. 55.
2. *Mbh.*, XVI. 4.12f ; *Vi. Pu.*, V. 37. 54-5.
3. Schrader, *Intro. Pañca.*, p. 36.
4. *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, 23.132.
5. *Vi. Pu.*, II. 5. 18.
6. Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 24.
7. K.P. Jayaswal, *History of India*, 150 A.D.—350 A.D., p. 20.
8. Yaduvanshi, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
9. S. v. *musalin*, Apte, SED.
10. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 25 ; *Hariv.*, II. 46; *Bhā. Pu.*, X. 66.



its course on being pulled by his ploughshare, and how Hastināpura, pushed by his pestle (*musala*), became inclined towards the Gaṅgā (Ganges).<sup>1</sup> He killed the monkey demon Dvivida who destroyed crops.<sup>2</sup> Even the name 'Saṅkarṣaṇa', which literally means the act of ploughing or furrowing, bears witness to his agricultural character. The association of the nāgas with fertility is quite well known<sup>3</sup>, and the agricultural character of the god may further support his nāga origin.

The *Arthaśāstra* passage speaks of Saṅkarṣaṇa as a deity of the ascetics with shaved head or braided hair. Traditionally, Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa himself is said to be great yogī, the teacher of the whole universe, who himself taught the Bhāgavata Dharma, described in the Sāttvata Śāstra.<sup>4</sup> The *Mahabhārata* states that Saṅkarṣaṇa expounded the *sāttvata vidhi* or Sāttvata mode of worship at the end of the Dvāpara and the beginning of the Kali.<sup>5</sup> In the vyūha cosmogony the quality through which he is said to perform his functions is described occasionally as *bala* or power in view of his name Baladeva but sometimes also as *jñāna* or knowledge,<sup>6</sup> and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* equates him with knowledge<sup>7</sup>. The work further associates him especially with the Pañcarātra knowledge<sup>8</sup>. We have elsewhere pointed out the association of the ascetics with Pañcarātra cult<sup>9</sup> and its development in an agricultural society<sup>10</sup>; it is curious that the pre-Āryan fertility god Śiva also is conceived of as a great yogī and ascetic.<sup>11</sup> Several scholars<sup>12</sup> have traced the origin of yoga to Indus valley culture, and although it is difficult to determine the true nature of the connection between the yoga, which also means the yoke, and agriculture, we may not be wrong in suggesting that the idea grew out of the magical rites accompanying agriculture.

1. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 35 ; *Bhā. Pu.*, X. 68. 41f.

2. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 36.

3. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 319.

4. *Bhā., Pu.*, VI. 16. 33-46.

5. *Mbh.*, VI. 62. 42.

6. Schrader, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

7. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 142.5.

8. *Ibid.*, III. 73.48.

9. *Supra*, pp. 47-8.

10. *Supra*.

11. Yaduvanshi, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

12. R. P. Chanda, *MASI*, XXXI, p. 33 ; D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of the Ancient Indian Culture*, p. 80 ; G. C. Pande, *The Origins of Buddhism*, p. 256.



However, the worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa appears to have been quite popular in the fourth century B.C., and Megasthenes seems to refer to him. The Greek writer<sup>1</sup> referring to Dionysos clearly states that the Indians speak of three individuals of this name appearing in different ages and they assign suitable achievements to each of these. The oldest of these was Indos, apparently the same as Indra, “who crushed grapes and discovered the use of the properties of wine”. He further states that Dionysos also found out the method of growing figs and other fruit trees and taught this knowledge to others whence he was called Lenaios. This may be a corruption of Liṅgayaśas or Lingin, a name of Śiva. The third god, spoken of in this context, is Katapogon ; and Megasthenes states that he was so named because it is a custom among Indians to grow their beards with great care. Katapogon is evidently the same as Kapardin, meaning one wearing braided and matted hair.<sup>2</sup> The epithet is usually applied to Śiva ; but it may have been applied to Saṅkarṣaṇa also since the worshippers of Saṅkarṣaṇa, as we have shown earlier, wore braided (*jaṭila*) hair. At any rate, the three gods, who could have been confused with Dionysos by Megasthenes, are apparently Indra, Śiva and Saṅkarṣaṇa, all the three associated with wine and renowned for their bacchanalian habits. Arrian informs<sup>3</sup> us that before the coming of Dionysos Indians were nomads subsisting on the bark of the trees known as *tāla* (fan-palm) and that when Dionysos came to India he taught them to sow the land, and it was he who “first yoked oxen to the plough and made many Indian husbandmen and gave the people the seeds of cultivated plants”. The description eminently suits the agricultural divinity Saṅkarṣaṇa, the wielder of the plough, with the fan-palm as his emblem. Arrian also writes that according to the Indians Dionysos was earlier than Herakles by fifteen generations ;<sup>4</sup> and as Herakles is generally identified with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, we may contend that the evidence of the classical writers shows that although Saṅkarṣaṇa was recognised as older than Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the popular mythology of the fourth century B.C. the Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva legends had not yet acquired the final shape in which they are presented to us in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*.

1. McCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, pp. 34-5, fn.
2. S. v. Kapardin, Apte, SED.
3. McCrindle, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-5.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.



Nevertheless, Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva appears as a Vṛṣṇi hero, the elder brother of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* Purāṇa complex. The historicity of these legends is often accepted and an attempt made to construct sober history by eliminating the impossible and the improbable.<sup>1</sup> Without placing any reliance on such euhemeristic attempts we may observe that Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa, a nāga divinity, was identified with Baladeva of the Vṛṣṇis, who, as we will show later, was not a deified hero but an associate male god of the tribal Vṛṣṇi goddess Ekānamśā. Although it is very difficult to make any conjecture about the date of this event, the inscriptions of the first century B.C. bracket Saṅkarṣaṇa with Vāsudeva; and Patañjali seems to have known the legends of the two gods in their more or less present form. He mentions Baladeva and Vāsudeva among the Vṛṣṇi names<sup>2</sup> and speaks of Kṛṣṇa as second to Saṅkarṣaṇa<sup>3</sup>, thereby indicating their relationship. Some other epithets of Saṅkarṣaṇa such as Rauhiṇeya<sup>4</sup>, the son of Rohiṇī, Lāṅgalin<sup>5</sup>, the wielder of the plough, and Rāma<sup>6</sup> (Balarāma), are also mentioned in the *Mahābhāṣya*. Evidently the identification of Saṅkarṣaṇa with Baladeva of the Vṛṣṇi lineage was accomplished long before Patañjali.<sup>7</sup> The real significance of the name 'Saṅkarṣaṇa' is forgotten in the Purāṇas, which invent a fanciful story to explain it. It is stated that the seventh child of Devakī was transferred from her womb to that of her co-wife Rohiṇī by Yoganidrā for fear of Kamsa. As the child was dragged from one womb to another, he came to be known as Saṅkarṣaṇa.<sup>8</sup> However, in some earlier passages Kṛṣṇa, and not Balarāma, is described as the seventh child of Devakī.<sup>9</sup>

Both the epigraphic and the literary sources indicate that in the beginning Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva were placed on an equal footing and the position of the former was in no way inferior to the latter. An inscription<sup>10</sup> of the first century B.C. gives a precedence to

1. Cf. A.D. Pusalker, *The Vedic Age*, p. 297f.
2. On Pā., IV. I. 114, *Mahā.*, II, p. 257.
3. Ibid., II. 2. 24, *Mahā.*, I, p. 426.
4. Ibid., IV. 3.35, *Mahā.*, II, p. 115.
5. Ibid., VI. 4. 114, *Mahā.*, III, p. 225.
6. Ibid., II. 2. 34, *Mahā.*, I, p. 436.
7. For the date of Patañjali's work see supra.
8. *Hariv.*, II. 2. 31f; *Vi. Pu.*, IV. 15.29. V. 1. 75.
9. *Vā. Pu.*, *Bibl. Ind.*, II. 34. 162-5; *Bālacarita*, Act I. 10; but according to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (V.1. 8; 2.2f) Kṛṣṇa was the eighth child of Devakī.
10. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 91-2.



Saṅkarṣaṇa in the compound *saṅkarṣaṇa-vāsudevabhyām* and describes him as *bhagavat* and *sarveśvara* (the lord of all) along with Vāsudeva. Another inscription<sup>1</sup> of the same period found in a cave at Nānāghāt invokes the two deities in a similar fashion. Later with the development of the vyūha theology Saṅkarṣaṇa is invariably mentioned after Vāsudeva in the texts of the Gupta period.<sup>2</sup> This shows that even in the first century B.C. the popularity and prestige of Saṅkarṣaṇa was quite undiminished. According to a passage<sup>3</sup> of the *Mahābhārata* Saṅkarṣaṇa was the incarnation of a white and Vāsudeva of a black hair of the supreme god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. Thus both were partial incarnation of a great god whose superior authority was already well established. Saṅkarṣaṇa is described as the first born, the eldest of all beings<sup>4</sup>, and the existence of a powerful cult of Śeṣa is indicated by a passage which states that some people describe the highest region as that of Viṣṇu, some as that of Brahmā, some as that of Nara and some others as that of Śeṣa.<sup>5</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks of Śeṣa as one of the *prajāpatis*, the progenitors.<sup>6</sup> The cult was evidently totemistic. The cosmogonic myth of Śeṣa balancing the world on his thousand hoods is often referred to in the epics, and sometimes he is described as a transformation or a form of the god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.<sup>7</sup> Garuḍa once tried but failed to find the end of the serpent who was identical with Viṣṇu and Baladeva. But later the cult of Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa became completely subordinate to the syncretistic divinity Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva, and in a passage of the *Mahābhārata* Baladeva had to admit frankly that he could not dare cast his eyes on the world without the favour of Kṛṣṇa and so he followed and assisted Keśava in whatever he wished to achieve.<sup>8</sup> Traditionally Viṣṇu is described as resting on the serpent Śeṣa lying on the waters. The myth indicates the subordination of the non-

1. Ibid., p. 186, line 1 of the lins.

2. Refer *The Amarkośa*, I. 1. 18-30, which enumerates the names of Vāsudeva Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha in conformation to the vyūha scheme. We cannot accept Raychaudhuri's contention that the vyūha worship disappeared in the Gupta period (EHVS, p. 176). On the other hand, available evidence indicates that the doctrine of vyūha developed sometime in the third-fourth century A.D. and it is elaborately treated in the Pañcarātra texts of the Gupta and the post-Gupta periods.

3. *Mbh.*, I. 189. 31.

4. Ibid., VI. 63. 10 ; XII. 200. 10.

5. Ibid., XII. 271. 50.

6. *Rāmā.*, III. 14. 7.

7. *Mbh.*, III. 187. 10.

8. Ibid., V. 154. 31.



brāhmaṇical divinity of agricultural masses to the brāhmaṇical god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. The original non-brāhmaṇical or even anti-brāhmaṇical attitude of Saṅkarṣaṇa-worship is reflected in the story of brāhmaṇicide<sup>1</sup> committed by Saṅkarṣaṇa, for which he had to expiate by going on a long pilgrimage. The alliance of his cult with that of Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa must have promoted the cause of Vaiṣṇavism by winning over a large number of agricultural population to its fold, but it also pushed the worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva into the background, and in the vyūha theory the *agraja* or the elder brother came to occupy the subordinate anomalous position of a mere emanatory form of the supreme god Vāsudeva-Nārāyaṇa.

The Purāṇic tradition describes Revatī, the daughter of king Raivata, as the wife of Baladeva. It is narrated<sup>2</sup> that king Raivata went to heaven to seek the advice of Brahmā in selecting a bridegroom for his daughter, but by the time he came back, millions of years had already lapsed on earth, and people had become much shorter in height. The king bestowed Revatī on Balarāma, who to curb her inordinate height bent her down with the point of his plough.<sup>3</sup> A disease goddess Revatī, who afflicts children is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*<sup>4</sup>; and in the *Suśruta*<sup>5</sup> she is described as unusually tall, fierce and hunchbacked, wearing colourful garlands and earrings. Popular mythology seems to have postulated a matrimonial alliance between the two divinities, a phenomenon not uncommon.

The region of Mathura appears to have been the stronghold of Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva worship. Most of his exploits such as dragging of the river Yamunā, killing of the demons Dhenuka, Pralamba and Dvivida are set in this locality. Kṛṣṇa, having once left Vraja for Dvārakā, never returns, but Baladeva comes back to dally with the cowherds and to drink the wine which flows out of a *Kadamba* tree in Vṛndāvana.<sup>6</sup> The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes<sup>7</sup> how Citra-ketu, the king of the Śūrasena country, after purifying himself with a bath in the Kālindī river (Jamna) received the *mantropaniṣad*, the sacred formula, which enabled him to have a vision of lord Saṅkar-

1. *Bhā. Pu.*, X. 78. 21f.

2. *Vi. Pu.*, IV. 1. 67f.

3. *Ibid.*, V. 95.

4. *Mbh.*, III. 219. 28.

5. *The Suśruta, Uttara Tantram*, 31. 10-1.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 251f.

7. *Bhā. Pu.*, VI. 14-6.



ṣaṇa. Nāga worship appears to have been very popular in the Mathura region, and a large number of the nāga statues discovered so far have been found in its vicinity.

In the centuries just preceding the Christian era the worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa was still quite popular. Apart from the two inscriptions mentioned earlier there are several other pieces of archaeological and literary evidence indicating the popularity of his cult during this period. A stone idol of Saṅkarṣaṇa attributed to the second century B.C.<sup>1</sup> happens to be one of the earliest extant images of the brāhmaṇical gods. It was discovered near Mathura and is now preserved in the Lucknow Museum. It has a snake-canopy and holds a plough in one of its hands. Two fan-palm capitals discovered among the ruins of Besnagar<sup>2</sup> and one at Pawaya<sup>3</sup> in the former state of Gwalior indicate the existence of the temples of Saṅkarṣaṇa at these places in the second and first centuries B.C. The *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali<sup>4</sup> also speaks of the temples of Balarāma and Keśava, and a passage occurring in the Buddhist canonical commentary, the *Niddesa*, dated in the first century B.C. refers to the worshippers of Baladeva.<sup>5</sup>

References to Saṅkarṣaṇa in the records of the post-Christian era are few and far between. The Nāsik cave inscription<sup>6</sup> of A.D. 149 compares Gautamiputra Śātakarṇi to Rāma, that is, Balarāma, and Keśava in prowess. We have no epigraphic mention of the deity in the third century A.D., but he is referred to in the opening verse of the *Svapnavāsavadatta* of Bhāsa, and in some early Tamil poems. Nakkīrar, an early Tamil poet of the third century A.D.,<sup>7</sup> compares his patron, a Pāṇḍya king, to Śiva, Baladeva, Kṛṣṇa and Subrahmaṇya in various qualities<sup>8</sup>; and the *Śilappadhikāram*, a work of the fifth-sixth century A.D.,<sup>9</sup> speaks of the existence of the temples of these four gods in Madurā and Kāveripaṭṭaṇam. This shows that in the South the worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa flourished unabated down to the sixth century A.D. The discovery of a number of

1. V.S. Agrawala, JISOA, 1937, p. 126, pl. xiv.

2. D.R. Bhandarkar, ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 189.

3. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 104.

4. On Pa., II. 2. 34; *Mahā.*, I, p. 436.

5. *Infra*.

6. EI. VIII, Nāsik cave ins. no. ii, lines 7-8.

7. Nilakanta Sastri in *A Comprehensive History of India*, II, p. 681.

8. S.K. Aiyangar, *Some Contributions of South India to Indian Culture* pp. 54f., 104.

9. Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*, p. 112.



fragmentary images of the deity in the Mathura Art of the Kuṣāṇa and the Gupta periods indicates the continuance of his worship in the North also. The Gadhwa stone inscription<sup>1</sup> of A.D. 468 speaks of the installation of an image of Anantasvāmin, who appears to have been a form of Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa. Another inscription of the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. found near Gauhati records the construction of a cave-temple for *bhagavat* Balabhadra-svāmin.<sup>2</sup> Sculptures depicting the exploits of Balarāma, assignable to the fourth and the sixth centuries A.D., have been discovered at Mandor<sup>3</sup> in Rājputāna and Paharpur in Bengal;<sup>4</sup> but these portray him more as an elder brother and associate of Kṛṣṇa than as an independent deity. The rock-cut statues of Balarāma and Revatī discovered at Rūpabāsā<sup>5</sup> in the former state of Bharatpur are reckoned among the best specimens of the Gupta Art. But with the growing popularity of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu the cult of Saṅkarṣaṇa ultimately lost ground, and later iconographic texts make a distinction between the *vibhava* or the incarnatory and the *vyūha* or the emanatory acolyte form of Saṅkarṣaṇa.<sup>6</sup> In the former he still retained traces of his nāga and agricultural origins, but in the latter he became quite undistinguishable from Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu; and the only distinction between an image of the *vyūha* Saṅkarṣaṇa and of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu lay in the fact that the order of the emblems held in the hands of the images differed in each case, but the emblems held by the *vyūha* Saṅkarṣaṇa were characteristically those of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu; and thus the personality of the god Saṅkarṣaṇa was completely absorbed into that of Viṣṇu.

To conclude, Saṅkarṣaṇa was originally a non-brāhmaṇical agricultural divinity with an influential following among the masses. He was identified with Baladeva of the Vṛṣṇis prior to the second century B.C.; and thus ultimately led to the alliance of his cult with that of the brāhmaṇical god Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva, which in course of time completely dominated it and absorbed it into its ever-expanding fold.

1. CII, III, no. 66.

2. *Infra*.

3. ASIAR, 1905-06, p. 136.

4. ASIAR, 126-27, p. 140f.

5. Cunningham, ASR, XX, p. 98.

6. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 393.



## Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa

Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is one of the most intriguing characters of Indian mythology. For centuries his legends have enjoyed immense popularity among the Indian masses, and it is no wonder that ever since the Indologists were attracted to the religions of India, he should have commanded their major attention. A large number of orientalist of the previous and the present era, Wilson<sup>1</sup>, Weber<sup>2</sup>, Barth<sup>3</sup>, Grierson<sup>4</sup>, Garbe<sup>5</sup>, Hopkins<sup>6</sup>, Jacobi<sup>7</sup>, Kennedy<sup>8</sup>, Keith<sup>9</sup>, Macnicol<sup>10</sup>, Barnett<sup>11</sup>, Eliot<sup>12</sup>, Ruben<sup>13</sup>, and Gonda<sup>14</sup>, to name a few of the Western, and R.G. Bhandarkar<sup>15</sup>, R.P. Chanda<sup>16</sup>, V.S. Sukthankar<sup>17</sup>, H.C. Raychaudhuri<sup>18</sup>, A.D. Pusalker<sup>19</sup>, J.N. Banerjea<sup>20</sup>, and D.C. Sircar<sup>21</sup> among the Indian scholars of repute, along with a host of others<sup>22</sup> have discussed and analysed the Kṛṣṇa saga from various angles. The earlier views of the solar origin of the deity propounded by Barth<sup>23</sup> and his vegetational origin by Keith<sup>24</sup> no longer find support; a thorough criticism of these and the theory of the Christian origin of Kṛṣṇa legends was offered by Raychaudhuri in his *The Early History of Vaiṣṇava Sect*. His thesis that Vāsudeva-

1. Wilson, *The Religion of the Hindus*, Vol. II, pp. 65-7.
2. Weber, IA, 1874, p. 285f; *ibid.*, 1901, p. 284f.
3. Barth, *The Religions of India*, p. 166f.
4. Grierson, IA, 1908, p. 252f; ERE, II, pp. 538-51.
5. Garbe, IA, 1918, app. p. 9f; ERE, II, pp. 535-8.
6. Hopkins, *The Religions of India*, p. 464f; CHI, Vol. I, pp. 257.
7. Jacobi, ERE, VII, pp. 193-7.
8. Kennedy, JRAS, 1907, p. 951f.
9. Keith, JRAS, 1915, p. 840f; *ibid.*, 1917, p. 173.
10. Macnicol, *The Indian Theism*, p. 36f.
11. Barnett, *The Hindu Gods and Heroes*, p. 66f.
12. Eliot, *Hindu. Budd.*, II, p. 154f.
13. Ruben, JRAS, 1941, p. 340f.
14. Gonda, AEV, p. 154f.
15. R.G. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 11f.
16. R.P. Chanda, *Archaeology and Vaiṣṇava Tradition*, MASI, no. 5.
17. Sukthankar, *On the Meanings of the Mahābhārata*, Lecture II f.
18. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, Lectures i & ii.
19. Pusalker in *The Glory that was Gurjarade'sa* I, 1943, p. 111f.
20. Banerjea in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II, pp. 380-5.
21. Sircar in AIU, pp. 432-3.
22. For some other references see Pusalker, *Studies in Epics and Purāṇas of India*, p. 49, f.n.1.
23. Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
24. Keith, JRAS, 1915, p. 841.



Kṛṣṇa, a hero of the Sāttvata sect of the Yādavas, was apotheosised first by his clansmen who imparted his worship to others has received general approval.

Rachaudhuri does not distinguish between Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1</sup> However, several scholars<sup>2</sup> have been quite sceptic about the original identity of the two. The question was first raised by A. Govindacharya Svamin<sup>3</sup>, who held that Bhāgavatism originated with the deity Vāsudeva who was different from Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, but the two were identified in course of time. His contention is mainly based on a passage<sup>4</sup> of the *Padma Tantra*, a Pañcarātra text, which lays down that the image of the son of Vasudeva should be made like that of the god Vāsudeva. Refuting it Raychaudhuri pointed out that in the *Bhagavadgītā*, certainly an earlier work than the *Padma Tantra*, Vāsudeva is said to be a scion of the Vṛṣṇis as Dhanañjaya was of the Pāṇḍavas, and according to *Mahābhārata* Bhāgavatism was first preached by Vāsudeva to Arjuna.<sup>5</sup> Another scholar<sup>6</sup> added that the Pañcarātras invented the myth of a supreme Vāsudeva other than Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in order to absolve their deity of the misdeeds and cunning tricks attributed to the latter, such as his advice to kill Droṇa and Duryodhana by guile etc. But this does not seem to be the correct explanation. The *Padma Tantra* is a late work, certainly later than the *Jayākhyā* and the *Ahīrbudhnyā Saṃhitās*, and hence the product of a period when the philosophic concept of the *viśvarūpa* of Viṣṇu, that is, Viṣṇu as the embodiment of the whole universe, and the *vyūha* theory conceiving the deity as the highest principle from whom all other deities and the universe emanated, were fully established. As such the work would naturally distinguish between a supra-mundane god Vāsudeva and his incarnation Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, just as later Pañcarātrins differentiated between the *vyūha* Saṅkarṣaṇa and *vibhava* (incarnatory) Saṅkarṣaṇa. The development was analogous to the Buddhist concept of the Ādi-Buddha from whom the rest of the Buddhas were supposed to emanate.

1. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 36.

2. Eliot, *Hind. Budd.*, II, p. 154 ; Gonda, op. cit., p. 161 ; R.G. Bhandarkar, op. cit., p. 15f ; Parashurama Chaturvedi, *Vaiṣṇava Dharma*, p. 21.

3. A Govindacharya Svamin, JRAS, 1911, p. 936.

4. *Vasudeva-sutasyāpi sthāpanam Vāsudeva-vat*, *The Padma Tantra*, III. 29. 28, quoted ibid.

5. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 32, 35.

6. Sircar, AIU, p. 440.



Nevertheless, certain pieces of evidence suggest that Vāsudeva was originally the name of a deity. It is pointed out<sup>1</sup> that Patañjali draws a line between a divine and a kṣatriya Vāsudeva. Commenting upon Pāṇini's oft-discussed sūtra, *vāsudevārjunābhyām vun*<sup>2</sup>, Patañjali raises a question<sup>3</sup> as to why Pāṇini should have provided for a separate suffix *vun* for Vāsudeva since the form Vāsudevaka could be obtained by using a similar suffix *vuñ*. In answer to this self-posed query, Patañjali states that Pāṇini wanted to give precedence to Vāsudeva<sup>4</sup>, and adds *athavā naiṣa kṣattriyākhyā samjñā eṣā tatrābhavataḥ*<sup>5</sup>, "or else, it is not a kṣatriya name, it is the name of the honourable one". According to Pāṇini the suffix *vuñ* should be applied to those who are of a kṣatriya gotra.<sup>6</sup> On the basis of this statement of Patañjali it is contended that he refers to a divine Vāsudeva other than the Vṛṣṇi hero. In our opinion, this inference is doubtful. No doubt Patañjali admits the existence of a kṣatriya Vāsudeva by prefacing the phrase with an *athavā*, 'or'; but we cannot be sure that he has two Vāsudevas in view; he may have referred to the deified Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, perhaps already known as a kṣatriya, and commented in the same vein as any pious Hindu would know that Rāma of the Solar race was not a kṣatriya (meaning thereby an ordinary kṣatriya) but the Lord himself.

There are certain other arguments put forth<sup>7</sup> in favour of the view that Vāsudeva was originally the name of a deity. It is held that in the *Mahābharata* and the *Purāṇas* the word Vāsudeva, derived from the root *vas*, 'to dwell', means one who dwells in all things.<sup>8</sup> But not much reliance can be placed on these epic and Purāṇic etymologies, which were apparently invented by the bards in accordance with their whims and fancies. Thus at one place<sup>9</sup> Sāttvata, the well-known clan name of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, is explained as one who is of the nature of 'goodness' (*sattva*),<sup>9</sup> and can be known only

1. K.B. Pathak, JBBRAS, XXIII, p. 96f; S.N. Dasgupta, *The History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 539; S.K. Aiyangar, *Proceedings and Transactions of the Second Oriental Conference*, p. 351f.

2. *Pā.*, IV. 3. 98.

3. *Mahābhāṣya*, Vol. II, p. 314, line 10f.

4. *Vāsudevaśabdasya pūrvanipātaṁ vakṣyāmi*, *ibid.*, p. 315, line 12.

5. *Ibid.*, lines 12-3.

6. *Pā.*, IV. 3. 99.

7. Eliot, *Hind. Budd.*, Vol. II, p. 162f ; 194-5.

8. *Vi. Pu.*, 1.2.12; *Mbh.*, XII. 328.36.

9. *Ibid.*, XII. 330. 12-13.



through this attribute". Nor does the argument that the Jain narratives mention Vāsudeva as a title of a series of super-men has much force, for these accounts repeatedly refer to the same situations and constantly present identical descriptions, and hence they are not of much value; they refer to not only a series of Vāsudevas and Baladevas but also as many prati-Vāsudevas or their opponents. The next piece of evidence is certainly worthy of greater consideration; the *Mahābhārata* mentions a false Vāsudeva and a true Vāsudeva which indicates the existence of either two Vāsudevas or two forms of worship of the god Vāsudeva.<sup>1</sup> We may further draw attention to a verse<sup>2</sup> in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which clearly differentiates between the deity Vāsudeva and Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva and Devakī. It states that a part of the god Vāsudeva is established in a twofold manner in the persons of Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva.

The cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa discloses many non-Vedic and non-Āryan elements. According to a Ṛgvedic passage<sup>3</sup>, Indra for the benefit of his favourite drink *drapsa*<sup>4</sup> (diluted sour milk ?)<sup>5</sup> defeated a non-Āryan chief Kṛṣṇa, who was equipped with an army of ten thousand soldiers, on the banks of Amśumati. Amśumati is identified with modern Jamna, and the non-Āryan chief, explained as an asura by Sāyaṇa, with the epic god of the same name.<sup>6</sup> Whatever may be the identity of the Ṛgvedic Kṛṣṇa, the name certainly indicates a non-Āryan genesis. The stories of Kṛṣṇa's forcible appropriation of the Pārijāta tree from Indra, and the banning of the Indra festival, refer to a struggle between the non-Vedic cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and that of Indra in which the latter lost ground.<sup>7</sup> The hostility between the two cults also points to the antiquity of Kṛṣṇa-worship, for the cult of Indra lost much of its prestige with the rise

1. Infra.

2. *bhagavadvāsudevāmśo dvidhā yo'yam vyavasthitah*, Vi. Pu., V. 17. 26.

3. RV, VIII. 96.13-5.

4. Gonda, AEV, p. 157.

5. S.v. *drapsa*, Apte, SED.

6. D.R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian History and Culture*, pp. 82-3; Radhakrishnan, *The Indian Philosophy*, p. 87.

7. As these incidents are directly connected with the doings of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, it will be wrong to describe them (see, B.K.G. Shastri, *The Bhakti Cult in Ancient India*, p. 103) as traces of a conflict between the cults of Viṣṇu and of Indra, for the identification of Viṣṇu with Kṛṣṇa is posterior to the origin of these legends.



of Buddhism after the reign of Aśoka, and it could not have been a serious rival in the post-Christian era<sup>1</sup>.

The saga of Kṛṣṇa is a conglomeration of several heterogeneous elements mingled together into a harmonious whole<sup>2</sup>. The diversity of his character has struck several scholars.<sup>3</sup> He is a warrior, a preacher, a child-god of some pastoral tribe and a love-god of the popular lore, all blended into one. Efforts at euhemeristic representation of his legends by some Indian scholars are stretched too far, and it is accepted<sup>4</sup> as a literal truth that the dragging of the mortar by child-Kṛṣṇa uprooted the two Arjuna trees (or a Yamala and an Arjuna tree, *yamalārjunau*), although there is hardly any doubt that the incident refers to the supplanting of some local tree-worship by the Vāsudeva cult. The *Harivaṃsa* expressly states that these trees were being worshipped as gods for granting objects of desire<sup>5</sup>. Sometimes such flights into imagination degenerate into absurdity. It is stated that the herdsmen, who on the advice of Kṛṣṇa were engaged in worshipping Nature, "the visible manifestation of God", in the form of the Govardhana hill, were saved by him from heavy rains through some "miraculous device",<sup>6</sup> and according to another writer<sup>7</sup>, the device was apparently a newly discovered cave into which Kṛṣṇa led them. Such reconstructions are obviously on a par with the attempts of the orthodox pundits to explain away *aiṇeyam māṃsam* and *Kṛṣṇa mṛgam*, literally the flesh of the black deer, eaten by Rāma according to a *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, as the name of a kind of wild fruit<sup>8</sup>, and need not be considered sober history. According to Raychaudhuri<sup>9</sup>, the quarrel of Kṛṣṇa with his maternal uncle appears to have a historical foundation, for it is mentioned in the *Ghaṭā Jātaka*, the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali and the *Mahābhārata*. But we find that even in the fourth century B.C. both Kāṃsa and Kṛṣṇa were regarded as pastoral deities, as Kauṭilya<sup>10</sup> prescribes their invocation for those engaged in collecting medicinal herbs. The story of the enmity between Kāṃsa and

1. H.D. Bhattacharyya in AIU, p. 475.

2. Kosambi, JESHO, IV, p.214.

3. Cf. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 50 ; Winternitz, HIL, I, p.456; Kennedy, JRAS, 1907, p. 961.

4. Pusalker, *Studies In The Epics and The Purāṇas*, p. 69.

5. *Hariv.*, II. 7.22.

6. Pusalker, op. cit.

7. Bhagavan Das, *Kṛṣṇa*, p. 62.

8. *Rāmā.*, II. 56. 22-8, translated in the Gita Press, ed., Vol. I, pp. 342-3.

9. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 75.

10. *Aś*, XIV. 3.



Kṛṣṇa, mentioned in all the sources, Jaina, Buddhist and brāhmanical, may have a deeper significance; and it seems to symbolise a struggle between the mother-right represented by the maternal uncle Kāṁsa and the father-right by the sister's son Kṛṣṇa, in which the latter, a representative of the younger generation, emerges victorious. Patañjali refers<sup>1</sup> to the dramatic presentations of the killing of Kāṁsa by Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. Probably these were ritual-dramas, at least in origin, commemorating the victory of the patriarchal way of life. Raychaudhuri himself points out<sup>2</sup> that not everyone sympathised with Kṛṣṇa, and there were people whose sympathies lay with Kāṁsa. The fragmentary verse quoted by Patañjali, speaking of Kṛṣṇa as having treated his maternal uncle badly (*asādhurmātule kṛṣṇah*), was apparently composed by some sympathiser of Kāṁsa<sup>3</sup>.

Although the genealogies of the Vṛṣṇis as given in the *Harivaṁsa* and the *Purāṇas* undoubtedly depict them as a patriarchal people, their legends often betray their earlier matriarchal traditions. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* tells<sup>4</sup> us that Pradyumna, the son of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī, married Kakudvatī, the daughter of his maternal uncle Rukmin; and the issue of this marriage, Aniruddha, again married the daughter of his maternal uncle, Subhadrā, the granddaughter of Rukmin. Kṛṣṇa himself is said to have married his paternal aunt's (*pitṛsvasā*) daughter Mitravindā<sup>5</sup>. Even Subhadrā, the sister of Vāsudeva, is married to Arjuna, who, according to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* account, is her paternal aunt's son<sup>6</sup>. Pṛthā, the mother of Arjuna, was the daughter of Śūra and sister of Vāsudeva; and she was adopted by Kuntibhoja, a friend of her father.

But the most important evidence pointing to an older matriarchal substratum of the Vṛṣṇi saga centres round Ekānamśā, the sister of Baladeva and Vāsudeva. The *Harivaṁśa* speaks of her as the daughter of Nanda and Yaśodā, an incarnation of Viṣṇu's power of illusion (*yoganidrā*), who, when dashed against a stone by Kāṁsa rose in the sky and, assuming her divine form, informed him of the birth of Kṛṣṇa<sup>7</sup>. But the same account further tells us that the girl did not die; she was brought up like a son among the Vṛṣṇis and

1. Patañjali on Pā., III. I. 26; *Mahā.*, Vol. II, p. 34, lines 17-8; p. 36, lines 14-21.

2. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

4. *Vi. pu.*, IV. 16. 38-40; *Brahma Pu.*, 201. 6f.

5. Tadpatrikar, 'The Kṛṣṇa Problem', ABORI, X, p. 312.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, IV. 14.32f.

7. *Hariv.* II. 2.34f.



was worshipped by them for having protected Keśava<sup>1</sup>. The *Vāyu* and the *Brahmāṇḍa* also clearly state that the daughter of Nanda was brought up among the Vṛṣṇis who worshipped her<sup>2</sup>. These Purāṇas name her as Ekādaśā. The *Lalitavistara*<sup>3</sup> speaks of Ekādaśā as a goddess living in the west, along with seven other goddesses, such as Alambuśā, Kṛṣṇā, Draupadī etc. Ekānamśā is interpreted<sup>4</sup> as the personification of the only day 'receiving no part of the moon, an epithet of the day of the new moon'. In the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, she is identified<sup>5</sup> with Kuhū, a dark goddess sometimes identified with Amāvasyā and Sinīvālī<sup>6</sup>. She is also said to be identical with Bhadrā or Subhadrā who is worshipped with Balarāma and Keśava at the Purī temple in Orissa<sup>7</sup>. The inference is irresistible that the black goddess Ekānamśā, also known as Ekādaśā, was the tribal goddess of the Vṛṣṇis and was supposed to give them protection. Varāhamihira, in his short chapter on iconography in the *Bṛhat Samhitā*, states<sup>8</sup> that the image of Ekānamśā should be flanked on either side by the images of Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa. This shows that in the sixth century A.D. Ekānamśā was still worshipped with Baladeva and Vāsudeva as her associate gods. In our opinion, the cult of Ekānamśā is much older than that of Baladeva and Vāsudeva, who appeared in the beginning simply as associate male gods of the more important female divinity ; but with the changeover of social conditions from a matriarchal to patriarchal state, the goddess lost her importance and the male gods received greater prominence. There is a tendency among some scholars to ascribe a late origin to the cult of Ekānamśā<sup>9</sup> simply because the *Mahābhārata*, with the exception of the solitary passage referred to above and the *Harivaṃśa*, completely ignores the deity ; and her iconographic representations discovered so far generally belong to the post-Gupta period. But recently a Kuṣāṇa relief in the Mathura Art of the second century A.D., depicting the goddess standing between Balarāma and Keśava,

1. *Ibid.*, II.2.46 ; 100.13-4.

2. *Va. Pu.*, Bibliotheca Indica ed., II.31.203-5 ; *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*; III. 71.220f.

3. *Lalitavistara*, p. 390.

4. S. v. Ekānamśā, Apte, SED.

5. *Mbh.*, III. 208.8.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, II. 8.82.

7. Shyam Chand Mukherji, IHQ, XXXV, 1959, p. 192f.

8. *Br. Sam.*, 50. 37-9.

9. Shyam Chand Mukherji, op. cit., p. 190.



has come to light<sup>1</sup> ; it proves the prevalence of her cult in the early centuries of the Christian era. However, her association with the two male gods and her worship must be much older. The *Ghaṭa Jātaka*<sup>2</sup> describes Baladeva and Vāsudeva as younger brothers of Añjanā-devī, the black goddess, who, in our opinion, is the same female divinity called Ekānamśā elsewhere. Kāṁsa ruled over the city of Asitañjanā, that is, the city of the black Añjanā ; and it is said that as a result of the curse of Kaṇhadīpāyana (Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana) all the Vṛṣṇis perished except Añjanā-devī. The comparative silence of the epics and the Purāṇas over her worship may be explained by the fact that she had already dwindled into insignificance and made no longer any appeal to their authors, who were more interested in the exploits of Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva. By and by, the two gods grew in strength with the dominance of the patriarchal elements in society ; and they grew still stronger by a process of fusion with the male divinities of other tribes and regions ; but Ekānamśā was quite forgotten ; and features of her worship were appropriated by the great goddesses Durgā and Śrī-Lakṣmī. In the opening verse of the play *Svapnavāsavadatta*, it is not Ekānamśā but Śrī who is invoked along with Mādhava and Balarāma.

We have mentioned earlier that the inscriptions of the first century B.C. show Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva being worshipped jointly with equal veneration ; there are indications that sometimes not only the two but as many as five hero-gods of the Vṛṣṇis were worshipped jointly. An inscription<sup>3</sup> of the first century A.D. recovered from a well in Mora, a village seven miles west of Mathura city, records the setting up of the statues of the holy five heroes (*bhāgavatām pañcavīrāṇām*) of the Vṛṣṇis in a stone temple (*śaila-devagrhe*) built by a woman named Toṣā<sup>3</sup>. The images, made of stone, were meant for worship (*arcādeśām*) and are said to have a glowing and exceedingly handsome appearance.<sup>4</sup> Lüders identified the five heroes as Baladeva, Akrūra, Anādhṛṣṭi, Sāraṇa and Vidūratha on the basis of the Jaina sources<sup>5</sup>. But J. N. Banerjea<sup>6</sup> with the help of a passage in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*<sup>7</sup> identifies them as Baladeva,

1. R. C. Agrawala, 'Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva as attendant figures in early Indian sculpture', *IHQ*, XXXVIII, No. 1, 1962, pp. 86-8.

2. Fausboll, *Jātakas*, No. 454.

3. *EI*, XXIV, No. 27, 1.

4. *Jvalata iva paramavapuṣā*, *ibid.*, line 4.

5. Lüders, *EI*, XXIV, p. 199f.

6. Banerjea, *JISOA*, XIII, p. 64f.

7. *Vā. Pu.*, *Bibl. Ind. ed.*, II. 35. I-2.



Vāsudeva, Sāmba, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Tales about the legendary Vṛṣṇi ancestors appear to have been quite well-known in the first century A.D. ; and Aśvaghoṣa<sup>1</sup> refers to the extraordinary beauty of some of the Vṛṣṇis, Gada, Sāmba and Vidūratha. The Vaiṣṇavite texts mention the worship of Nārāyaṇa in his four forms Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, who are designated as the vyūhas or emanatory forms of the supreme god Viṣṇu. It is held that the supreme god *bhagavat* in his transcendental *para* (highest) form Vāsudeva creates from himself the vyūha Saṅkarṣaṇa and *prakṛti*, the primeval matter. From the association of Saṅkarṣaṇa and *prakṛti* arise the vyūha Pradyumna and *manas*, the cosmic mind ; and from the association of these two emanate the vyūha Aniruddha and *ahamkāra*, cosmic self-consciousness. The combination of Aniruddha and *ahamkāra* brings into existence the *mahābhūtas* or gross elements and Brahmā who from these elements fashions the earth and all that it contains. Evidently the vyūha theory attempts to provide a philosophic explanation of the worship of the Vṛṣṇi heroes<sup>2</sup>. It assigns the highest position to Vāsudeva because of his identification with Viṣṇu ; and it leaves out Sāmba, as Sāmba had become associated with the Iranian Sun cult<sup>3</sup>. Ancestor-worship is a characteristic feature of the early phases of the tribal society ; and, in our opinion, the collective worship of the Vṛṣṇi ancestors marks an intermediate stage in the development of the Vāsudeva cult, coming between the worship of Ekānamśā with the two associate gods and the emergence of Vāsudeva as the all-powerful supreme god. The earlier forms of worship survived for some time side by side with the worship of Vāsudeva, Viṣṇu ; but owing to the growing popularity of the latter eventually these faded away.

Coming to the legends of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, in the *Mahābhārata* he is primarily a warrior-god, a spiritual guide and helper of the Pāṇḍavas ; the Purāṇas narrate his early life. The orthodox view is that both versions supplement each other, and it is pointed out that the epic, as we have it now, contains occasional references to his earlier life<sup>4</sup>. Yet it is strange that the *Mahābhārata*, which gives

1. *The Saundarananda*, IX. 24.

2. The worship of *vīras* must have been very important ; for besides Vaiṣṇavism other religions also have attempted to explain it. In Śaivism the conception of Parama-Śiva, and, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, that of the five *dhyānī* Buddhas, who are regarded as the personifications of the five *skandhas* or elements, are developments on more or less the same lines.

3. J. N. Banerjea, *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.* Madras, 1944, pp. 82-90.

4. *Mbh.*, II. 18. ; 36.2 ; 38.6f. ; Tadpatrikar, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-8 ; Pusalker, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9, f.n.



elaborate details of numerous insignificant anecdotes, hardly dwells upon the early life of its favourite man-god, whom it never fails to exalt on every possible occasion. The argument<sup>1</sup> that the epic is principally occupied with the account of the war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and hence does not deal with Kṛṣṇa's miraculous childhood sounds rather lame, for the epic contains so much of extraneous material that, if it only kept the episode of the great war in view, it could not have acquired even one-fourth of its present bulk. The occasional and very rare references to Kṛṣṇa's life in the cow-settlement, although retained in the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*, must have found a very late entry, and it can hardly be questioned that the *Harivaṃśa*, which deals with Kṛṣṇa's early life, is, after all, only a late appendage to the body of the main epic, written and compiled much later. Evidently the brāhmaṇical recognition of the child-god and his identification with the hero-god of the Vṛṣṇi race is later than the recognition of the latter and his identification with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu ; it indicates different sources of the Kṛṣṇa legend. The Jaina accounts show no knowledge of a pastoral and infant-god Kṛṣṇa ; the *Antagaḍa-Dasao* and the *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* invariably connect him with Dvārakā and the mount Raivataka<sup>2</sup>, and never with the Mathura region. Apparently, the exploits of the Sāttvata hero form the nucleus to which the tales of other Kṛṣṇas were tagged on. It is suggested<sup>3</sup> that the weapon of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the wheel, is indicative of his high antiquity, for the use of wheel as a weapon went out of fashion long before the age of the Buddha.

Several scholars<sup>4</sup> identify Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī and the disciple of the sage Ghora Aṅgīrasa mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*<sup>5</sup>, with the epic hero. Raychaudhuri<sup>6</sup>, the chief protagonist of this view draws attention to identical passages from the Upaniṣad and the *Gītā* to substantiate the thesis first propounded by Grierson<sup>7</sup> that Bhāgavatism was a development of Sun-worship, and that Kṛṣṇa, a worshipper of the Sun, preached to others the doctrines learnt from

1. Pusalker, op. cit., p. 58.

2. Refer to the *Antagaḍa-Dasao*. Barnett's tr., pp. 13-5, 67-82, and *The Uttarādhyayana Sutra* translated in SBE Series, Vol. XLV, p. 112f.

3. Kosambi, JESHO, IV, p. 213.

4. The Grierson, IA, 1908, p. 253 ; ERE, II, p. 540, Garbe, Ibid, p. 535f ; Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 52-61 ; 78-83 ; H. C. Ray, JASB, 1923, p. 371f ; J.N. Banerjea in *A Comprehensive History of India*. Vol. II, p. 380-1.

5. *The Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, III. 17.6.

6. Raychaudhuri, op. cit.

7. Grierson, op. cit.



Ghora. The view has been seriously questioned by some scholars<sup>1</sup>, who have rightly shown that the parallelism between the teaching of Ghora and those of the *Bhagavadgītā* is only superficial ; none of the cardinal principles of Bhāgavatism as enunciated in the *Gītā* are referred to by Ghora. It is further pointed out that in the epic and the Purāṇic traditions Sāndīpani and Garga appear as the preceptors of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa instead of Ghora of the Aṅgiras family. We agree that the principal tenets of the *Bhagavadgītā*, its emphasis on devotion, and the unique philosophy of Yoga, are nowhere mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. But it is probable that the notion of a preacher Kṛṣṇa was derived from the tales of a sage Kṛṣṇa mentioned in the Upaniṣad. The pupillage of Kṛṣṇa to a sage of the Aṅgiras family is referred to in the first century A.D. by Aśvaghoṣa<sup>2</sup>, who states that taking after their preceptor's gotra Balarāma became a Gārgya, and Vāsu-bhadra, evidently the same as Vāsudeva, became a Gautama. According to Monier-Williams<sup>3</sup>, Gotama is the name of a ṛṣi belonging to the family of Aṅgiras.

The question when Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was identified with Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu has not been satisfactorily answered yet. It has been argued that the dedication of a Garuḍadhvaja, a flag-staff marked with Garuḍa, in honour of the god Vāsudeva, recorded by the Besnagar inscription of the second century B.C.<sup>4</sup>, indicates his identity with Viṣṇu. Raychaudhuri argues that Garuḍa, known also as Suparṇa, the golden-winged one, is connected with Viṣṇu and other Sun-gods<sup>5</sup>. On the basis of a Ṛgvedic passage, which describes the sun as a golden winged eagle<sup>6</sup>, Banerjea states that Garuḍa was originally a theriomorphic form of the Sun-god, and was first connected with the anthropomorphic form of the same deity personified in Viṣṇu. Later, with the identification of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu, Garuḍa came to be associated with Vāsudeva also<sup>7</sup>. The assumption, in our opinion, rests on very weak grounds. Raychaudhuri holds that the brāhmaṇas identified Vāsudeva with Viṣṇu to combat Buddhism, but the worshippers of Vāsudeva in the pre-Christian era ignored this

1. S.K. De, IHQ, XVIII, pp. 297-301 ; *Our Heritage*, Vol. I, 1953, p. 6. ; Pusalker, *Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas*, pp. 57-8.
2. *The Saundarananda*, I. 23.
3. S.V. Gautama, MW. SED.
4. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 90-1.
5. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 102 ; 110.
6. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 39 ; 152 ; Banerjea, JISOA, XIV, p. 66.
7. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, pp. 60-2.



identification, and hence, according to him, the name of Nārayaṇa-Viṣṇu does not occur in the early Bhāgavata inscriptions<sup>1</sup>. We fail to understand that if the worshippers of Vāsudeva did not consider their deity identical with Viṣṇu in the second century B.C., and if Garuḍa was originally associated with the Vedic god, how the same worshippers of Vāsudeva could dedicate Garuḍa-pillars in honour of their deity. In our opinion it is probable that the dedication of the Garuḍa banner to the god Vāsudeva, like the palmyra banner for Saṅkarṣaṇa, was an ancient practice, indicating an earlier compromise between the cults of Vāsudeva and Garuḍa. Garuḍas or Suparṇas are often mentioned in brāhmaṇical and non-brāhmaṇical sources as a class of lesser divinities along with the yakṣas, kinnaras, vidyādhara, nāgas, etc.,<sup>2</sup> and it appears that their worship, like that of the yakṣas and the nāgas, was popular with the masses. A passage of the *Culla Niddesa* refers to the worshippers of Suparṇa in the following manner "The Elephant is the deity to Elephant devotees; the Horse to Horse, the Cow to Cow, the Dog to Dog, the Crow to Crow, Vāsudeva to Vāsudeva, Baladeva to Baladeva, Pūrṇabhadra to Pūrṇabhadra, Maṇibhadradeva to Maṇibhadradeva, Agni to Agni, Nāga to Nāga, Suparṇa to Suparṇa, Yakṣa to Yakṣa... Those to those are worthy of homage are deities to them"<sup>3</sup>. The list, besides exhibiting the popular character of these cults, indicates the survival of the worship of numerous tribal totems even at the time of its compilation, in the first century B.C.<sup>4</sup>, and speaks strongly in favour of a totemic origin of the cult of Suparṇas and nāgas<sup>5</sup>. In course of time the Garuḍa and the nāga came to be allied with the cults of Vāsudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa, although their independent worship also must have continued. The cult of Garuḍa was evidently a good deal important, and the *Ādi Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* relates his exploits in detail. His alliance with Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu is described as the result of mutual compromise<sup>6</sup>, in which he agrees to sit on his banner in the beginning; later he is completely subordinated to Viṣṇu, and complains that although he is the lord of the three worlds he is to serve another<sup>7</sup>. In the struggle

1. Raychaudhuri, op, cit., pp. 109-10.

2. *Msm.*, I. 37; III. 196; VII. 23; The Nasik cave ins. of Vāsiṣṭhiputra Pulumāvi line 8, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 199.

3. For the text and translation see B.C. Law, *IHQ*, III, p. 251.

4. Sircar, *AIU*, p. 437.

5. Also see C.F. Oldham, *JRAS*, 1891, Article No. VII 'Serpent Worship in India', p. 369f.

6. Hopkins, *The Epic Mythology*, p. 21f.

7. *Mbh.*, V. 103.8.



that ensued between Garuḍa and Viṣṇu, the former was thoroughly humbled and could not even lift the arm of the greater god<sup>1</sup>. As Hopkins<sup>2</sup> points out, his legends do not indicate anything typically solar, except that he is described as the brother of Aruṇa, which in our opinion was apparently the result of poetical fancy, stimulated, perhaps, by the popular notion of the golden-winged bird and the Ṛgvedic simile. At any rate, the fact that the west is considered to be the abode of Garuḍa<sup>3</sup> clearly goes against the theory of his solar origin; so the offerings of Garuḍa banners for Vāsudeva in the second century B.C. may not throw any light on the question.

Nevertheless, the Besnagar inscription speaks of Vāsudeva as the god of gods (*devadeva*) and describes his devotee Heliodorus as a Bhāgavata. We have pointed out earlier that originally Bhāgavata was a designation of the votaries of Nārāyaṇa; so the fact that Heliodorus, while dedicating a Garuḍa banner in honour of Vāsudeva, calls himself a Bhāgavata does suggest that Vāsudeva was originally associated with Nārāyaṇa in the second century B.C. In the first century B.C. a Bhāgavata king Sarvatāta had a stone enclosure built round the place of worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva in the Nārāyaṇavāṭikā; and this may also point to the association of Vāsudeva with Nārāyaṇa. We have remarked elsewhere that the *Mahābhārata* invariably takes the identity of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu for granted; but the identity of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is not viewed in the same light; it has to be constantly vindicated and advocated. If it is accepted that the revised brāhmaṇical edition of the popular Bhārata epic was first promulgated in the Śuṅga period, it would corroborate the epigraphic evidence that the movement towards the identification of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu had begun about the second century B.C.

The Nānāghāt cave inscription<sup>4</sup> of queen Nāyanikā begins with an invocation to the deities Dharma, Indra, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, the Moon, the Sun and the four guardians of the quarters (*lokapālas*), Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera, and Vāsava, and then goes on to record the huge amounts of sacrificial fees paid to the priests for the performance of a number of Vedic sacrifices for the benefit of the donor. The

1. Ruben has discussed at length several ideas which may have contributed to the growth of myths about Garuḍa. JBORS, XXVII, 1941, p. 485f.

2. Hopkins, op. cit.

3. *Ācāraṅga Sūtra*, Book II, Lecture 15, translated by Jacobi, SBE, XXII, p. 198; *Mbh.*, V. 108.17.

4. *Infra*,



inscription is ascribed to the later half of the first century B.C. The Bhāgavata king Sarvatāta also performed an Aśvamedha sacrifice; and he was a brāhmaṇa. Raychaudhuri is certainly correct in his view that these inscriptions indicate an establishment of close relations between the worshippers of Vāsudeva and the brāhmaṇists,<sup>1</sup> and that Vedic priests identified Vāsudeva with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu to counter Buddhism and the active propaganda of Aśoka.<sup>2</sup> The popularity of Buddhism and similar heterodox sects told heavily against the cult of animal-sacrifice and weakened the prestige and authority of the priestly class, and the varṇa rules. A graver threat to the brāhmaṇical social order came from the changed economic condition of the lower varṇas and the large-scale entry of the foreign invaders who were favourably inclined towards Buddhism and the cult of popular divinities. For the survival of brāhmaṇism it was absolutely essential that without compromising brāhmaṇical socio-economic prejudices some device, dynamic enough to adapt to new conditions, should be evolved. The Vedic worship had become too rigid and inflexible, and Vedic sacrifices were too expensive to be revived again on a large scale; so the brāhmaṇas seized upon the devotional cults of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṅkarṣaṇa, and recognised these deities as forms of the orthodox divinity Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu to infuse brāhmaṇical social ethics into these popular cults and re-establish their authority. The identification of the popular god of non-Āryan origins with the orthodox divinity was only grudgingly accepted. In the *Māhābharata*, Śiśupāla pointedly asks, if Vāsudeva is the creator of the world, why does he not consider himself to be a brāhmaṇa<sup>3</sup>. Vāsudeva is described at first as the incarnation of only a fraction of the higher god, impersonating only a black hair of Nārāyaṇa.<sup>4</sup> Later he is said to represent the one-eighth portion of the god<sup>5</sup> whose another one-eighth comprises the whole world. In the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*<sup>6</sup> also he is an incarnate fraction of a portion of the Vedic god Viṣṇu, and it is not until after the sixth century A.D. in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that he is recognised as Viṣṇu incarnate in all his potency.

1. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 117.

2. Ibid., pp. 5-6 ; 107.

3. *Mbh.*, II. 39.6.

4. Ibid., I. 189. 31.

5. *Mbh.* XII. 271. 61.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 13.



It is pointed out<sup>1</sup> that in the *Bhagavadgītā* Arjuna often addresses Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu. But the date of the work is highly controversial; it is closely linked with that of the epic in its present form. The assertion<sup>2</sup> of another scholar about Megasthenes "The Greek ambassador definitely states that Kṛṣṇa was regarded as an incarnation of Viṣṇu" is evidently baseless. All that Megasthenes is reported to have said is "This Herakles is held in especial honour by Sourasenoi an Indian tribe who possess two large cities Mathura and Cleisobora and through whose country flows a navigable river called Iobares".<sup>3</sup> Herakles has been identified with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Sourasenoi with the Śūrasena Yādavas. The use of the words "especial honour" clearly indicates that Kṛṣṇa was still a minor divinity, far from being the supreme god that he becomes with his identification with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu; by no stretch of imagination it can be construed to refer to Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.

The last book of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* contains a number of Gāyatrīs for the invocation of several gods such as Rudra, Dantī, Nandī, Garuḍa, Māhasena Ṣaṇmukha, Nārāyaṇa, Nārasimha, and others. These Gāyatrīs also occur in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*, added as a supplement to the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*. The mantra<sup>4</sup> prescribed for Nārāyaṇa identifies the god with Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu, and so it is held<sup>5</sup> that the three deities were considered identical as early as the third century B.C. But the date of the last Prapāṭhaka of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* and the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* is extremely uncertain.<sup>6</sup> R.L. Mitra, in his introduction to the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, states that the first six books of the *Āraṇyaka* are of a very early date, the next three belong to the age of the Upaniṣads, but the last one, the tenth *Prapāṭhaka*, cannot be placed earlier than the beginning of the Christian era and is in tune with the earliest of the Tantra works.<sup>7</sup> The view of Keith<sup>8</sup>, who holds that even the last book of the *Āraṇyaka* is not later than the third century B.C., appears to us quite untenable, for the book also contains a mantra for the worship of the elephant-faced god with a curved tusk (*vakratuṇḍa*), described as Dantī, the

1. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, p. 62.

2. A.D. Pusalker, *Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas*, p. 65.

3. MacCrindle, *Ancient India as described by Megasthenes and Arian*, p. 206.

4. *nārāyaṇāya vidmahe vāsudevāya dhīmahi tanno viṣṇuḥ pracodayāt. Tai. Ar., X. 1.6.*

5. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 107.

6. Winternitz, HIL, pp. 235-8.

7. R.L. Mitra, *Tai. Ar., Bibliotheca Indica Series*, pp. 8-9.

8. Keith, JRAS, 1915, p. 840.



Toothed one, later known as Gaṇeśa who was not given a place in the brāhmaṇical pantheon prior to the first century A.D.<sup>1</sup> The extant images of the god cannot be dated earlier than the early Gupta period.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, a large number of brāhmaṇical scriptures seem to have been revised and enlarged in the post-Christian period ; hence the question of the authenticity and the probable period of the composition of a passage has to be thoroughly examined before any conclusions can be arrived at. K.P. Jayaswal<sup>3</sup>, on the basis of a passage occurring in the *tarpaṇa* (oblations of water to the manes, deities etc.) section of the *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra*<sup>4</sup> writes that a cowherd child Kṛṣṇa identical with Viṣṇu was known as early as the fourth century B.C., the generally accepted date of the work<sup>5</sup>. The passage recommends the offering of oblations to Viṣṇu by his twelve well-known names, Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanābha, and Dāmodara. Jayaswal interprets the term 'Govinda' as the keeper of the cows, and 'Dāmodara' as one who has a chord round his belly. Raychaudhuri, on the other hand, does not see any reference to Kṛṣṇa in the passage.<sup>6</sup> In his opinion the epithets such as Govinda were based on Viṣṇu's description as a *gopa* (herdsman) in a gvedic Rhymn; and he points out that according to the *Mahābhārata*<sup>7</sup> 'Dāmodara' means one whose splendour was not created by anybody else but is his own, and who has great self-control. However, we may point out that the same passage also explains the names of Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa and Sāttvata in a similar fashion<sup>8</sup>. These etymologies, if seriously taken<sup>9</sup>, will lead one to think that the terms were originally qualifying titles of the god Viṣṇu and may cast doubt on the historicity of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the main thesis of Raychaudhuri, advocated by him so enthusiastically. The term 'Keśava' also appears to have been one of the well-known names of the syncretistic god

1. Kali Kumar Dutta, *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1959, pp. 155-6.

2. Agrawala, *Cat. Br. Im. Ma. Art*, p. 37f; also see Banerjea, *DHI*, II ed., pp. 354-61, Karmarkar, *The Religions of India*, Vol. I, p. 158.

3. Jayaswal, *IA*, 1918, p. 84.

4. *Baudh. Dh. Sū.*, II. 5. 9. 10.

5. Macdonell, *HSL*, pp. 259-60; Winternitz, *HIL*, p. 278.

6. Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 48; *Mbh.*, V. 68.8.

8. *Mbh.*, XII. 328. 36; A. Govindacharya Svamin, *Mazdaism in the light of Viṣṇuism*, p. 17.

9. *Supra*, p. 56.



Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, and in the *Mahābhārata* its use for him is conspicuously frequent. With the epic bards the name 'Keśava' appears to have been as popular as 'Vāsudeva' or 'Kṛṣṇa'. In the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali<sup>1</sup> and in the Nāsik cave inscription of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puṣumāvi of A.D. 149<sup>2</sup> Vāsudeva is referred to as Keśava. Thus although we agree with Jayaswal that the passage in question identifies Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa with the herdsman-child-god, we may assert that it is a late interpolation. Bühler<sup>3</sup> in the introduction to his translation of the *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra* states that the sections on *tarpaṇa* are much enlarged by late additions, and that containing the twelve names of Viṣṇu, and the following one<sup>4</sup>, are given in one manuscript only<sup>5</sup>. We may point out that this section is certainly later than Patañjali, for whereas Patañjali distinguishes between Skanda and Viśākha<sup>6</sup>, the section identifies the two and gives some other names of the deity, Ṣaṇmukha, Mahāsenā and Subrahmaṇya<sup>7</sup>. The section also recommends oblations to a god described as Vināyaka, Hastimukha, Vakratuṇḍa, Ekadanta, and Lambodara<sup>8</sup>. These names indicate that the iconography of the god Gaṇeśa was fully developed, and we have stated above that his cult was brāhmanised not before the beginning of the Christian reckoning. The use of Vināyaka in singular also points to a later stage of his cult ; in the *Mahābhārata* the Vināyakas are mentioned in plural, and the reduction in their number does not seem to have occurred much before the Gupta period. We may also note that the section prescribes oblations for the planets<sup>9</sup>, Āditya, Soma, Aṅgāraka, Budha, Bṛhaspati, Śukra, and Śanaiścara, the presiding deities of the week days borrowed from the Greeks, and it is held that the week days were not introduced before the third or fourth century A.D.<sup>10</sup>

We may further state that the grouping of the twelve names of Viṣṇu was envisaged sometime in the third or the fourth century A.D. With the exception of the *Baudhāyana* no other Sūtra of an

1. On Pā., II. 2. 34. ; *Mahā.*, Vol. I, p. 436.
2. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 198, line 8 of the inscription.
3. Bühler, SBE, XIV, p. xxxv.
4. *Baudh. Dh. Sū.*, II. 5. 9 and 10.
5. Bühler, Op. cit., p. 252, f. n. 9. 1.
6. *Skandaviśākha*, on Pā., VI. 3.26 ; VIII. 1.5 ; *Mahā.*, Vol. III, p. 148 ; 370.
7. *Baudh. Dh. Sū.*, II. 5. 9. 8.
8. Ibid., II. 5. 9. 7.
9. *Baudh. Dh. Sū.*, II. 5. 9. 9.
10. Jolly, SBE, VII. p. xxxii.



early date refers to these. The *Mahābhārata* mentions the group only once in one of its late passages<sup>1</sup>. It is recommended that Kṛṣṇa should be worshipped on the twelfth of every month counted from Mārgaśīrṣa with a different name, beginning with Keśava and continuing with the rest. According to Varāhamihira the twelve forms of Viṣṇu are the presiding deities of the twelve months beginning with Mārgaśīrṣa.<sup>2</sup> In the Pañcarātra texts these are described as the twelve Mūrtipālas<sup>3</sup> (guardian-deities) or Vyūhāntaras<sup>4</sup> (further subdivisions of the vyūha forms) and connected with the Ṛtucakra (a diagram indicating the presiding deities of different months); they play a very important part in the diagrams and magical circles (*yantras*) of the Pañcarātrins<sup>5</sup>. In our opinion these twelve forms of the deity were visualised on the analogy of the twelve Ādityas, whose worship was originally connected with the monthly cycle of the year. The Ādityas, only seven or eight in the *Rgveda*<sup>6</sup>, become twelve in the Brāhmaṇas<sup>7</sup>. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* states that Prajāpati created the twelve Ādityas and placed them in the sky<sup>8</sup>. The *Gṛhya Sūtra* of Hiranyakeśin, one of the older Gṛhya Sūtras, prescribes the offering of water-libations to the Ādityas<sup>9</sup> in a group. It appears that later the twelve names of Viṣṇu and Śiva also were selected for a similar purpose. The *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* gives twelve names of Rudra-Śiva<sup>10</sup> although the *Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* knows only eight<sup>11</sup>. As the former work refers to both the *Bhārata* and the *Mahābhārata* versions of the epic, it could not be earlier than the revised version of the Bhārata epic. Sun-worship in India, although traceable to Rgvedic times, seems to have received great impetus during the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa rule<sup>12</sup>, and it is held that the worship of the Sun in images was a

1. *Mbh.*, XIII, 109. 3-14.

2. *Br. Sam.*, 105. 14-5.

3. *Para. Sam.*, II, 83-6,

4. *Ahir. Sam.*, VIII. 47-9.

5. *Ibid.*, V. 49 ; XXVI. 33f.

6. Max Muller, *The Vedic Hymns*, SBE, XXXII, pp, 252-3.

7. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upaniṣads*, Vol. I, p.222.

8. *Śat. Br.*, VI. 1.2.8.

9. SBE, XXX, p.243 ; *The Gṛhya Sūtra* of Hiranyakeśin, II.8.19. 1.

10. These are Hara, Mr̥ḍa, Śarva, Bhava, Mahādeva, Ugra, Bhīma, Paśupati; Rudra, Saṅkara, and Isāna. *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra*, IV.9.17.

11. *Baudh. Gr. Su.*, II.7.18.

12. Banerjea<sup>1</sup> DHI, II ed., pp. 137-40 ; 198-9 ; 430-45 ; Bhandarkar, VSMRS, pp.218-21.



Magian innovation<sup>1</sup>. The Magis seems to have come to India during the reign of the Scythians or perhaps a little earlier, and the patronage of foreign rulers contributed a good deal to the popularisation of their cult. We may suggest that it was the popularity of the Sun-cult during this period that induced the Vaiṣṇavite and the Śaivite priests to make similar groupings of the forms of their gods and connect these with the yearly solar calendar, although the idea of a guardian deity of each of the twelve months of the year originated among the worshippers of the Sun. In the Purāṇas Dvādaśamūrti (having twelve forms) is an epithet of the Sun-god<sup>2</sup>. On the basis of these pieces of evidence we may state that the passage was added to the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* at a later date, very probably in the Gupta age ; and it does not help us in determining the period when Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa were merged into one entity. We may also note that one of the twelve names describes Viṣṇu as Śrīdhara, the bearer of Śrī-Lakṣmī, and in our opinion the goddess was united with the god towards the beginning of the Gupta period.<sup>3</sup> Hence we may be justified in stating that the twelve forms of the god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva were systematised some time in the third or fourth century A.D. The conception of the twenty-four forms of Viṣṇu is still later ; it appears to have been borrowed from the worship of the twenty-four Jaina Tīrthaṅkaras.<sup>4</sup>

The tales of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa appear to have been quite popular in the early centuries preceding and following the Christian era. Patañjali refers to these on several occasions<sup>5</sup>. He cites Vāsudeva, Baladeva and Viśvakṣena among Vṛṣṇi names,<sup>6</sup> and mentions Satyabhāmā, the name of one of the chief wives of Kṛṣṇa, in a passage of the *Mahābhāṣya*<sup>7</sup>. The *Mahābhāṣya* citation which describes Janārdana, a name of Kṛṣṇa, as the fourth and thus refers to the *vyūha* doctrine seems to be a late interpolation ; or it may be held that the present text is a revised version of the work of Patañjali<sup>8</sup>. In the first century A.D. the Buddhist writer Aśvaghoṣa also shows full acquaintance with the exploits of Kṛṣṇa. He refers to Kṛṣṇa's slaying

1. Hazra, *St. Up.* 29-32.

2. Cf. *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa*, I I I. 59.76 ; IV. 34.75.

3. *Infra*.

4. D.C. Sircar, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p.130.

5. *Supra*, p. 56.

6. B. N. Puri, *India in the time of Patañjali*, p. 187.

7. On Pā., I. 1.4 ; *Maha.*, Vol. I, p. III line 24.

8. *Supra*, p. 25.



of Kāṃsa and the horse-demon Keśin in a passage of the *Saundarananda*<sup>1</sup>. It was apparently due to the popularity of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa that his cult was appropriated by the brāhmaṇical priests for propagating their ideas of social laws and ethics<sup>2</sup>.

The pastoral setting of Kṛṣṇa's childhood appears largely to be the result of his identification and amalgamation with the worship of some youthful god of the Ābhīra tribe. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* Kṛṣṇa tells<sup>3</sup> his tribesmen that they possess neither fields nor houses ; they wander about with their waggons and cattle, so to them cows and mountains are their deities, they need not worship Indra. The nomadic habits of the tribe among whom Kṛṣṇa is reared is further exemplified by the passage<sup>4</sup> which states that Vasudeva, soon after his release from prison by Kāṃsa, went "near the vehicle of Nanda" and found him rejoicing at the birth of a son. The passage may indicate that Nanda and his family lived in a vehicle<sup>5</sup>. Bhandarkar suggested that the foster-parents of Kṛṣṇa belonged to the Ābhīra tribe, modern Ahirs, who according to the *Harivaṃśa* occupied the country from Madhuvana near Mathura to Anūpa and Ānarta, the regions round Dvarakā<sup>6</sup>. The *Mausala Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* describes them as living near Pañcanada<sup>7</sup> ; and according to Ptolemy the country of the Ābhīras, designated as Abiria, lay in the Indus delta<sup>8</sup> ; but the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>9</sup> and the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* locate them near Saurāṣṭra and Aparānta (Koṅkaṇa)<sup>10</sup>. In the opinion of R. G. Bhandarkar, the Ābhīras were a foreign nomadic tribe who came to India in the early centuries of the Christian era, and brought with them Christian legends of a pastoral god whose identification with Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa led to the engrafting of Christian myths, such as the birth of Christ in a stable, the massacre of the innocents, etc., on the latter<sup>11</sup>. The theory of the Christian origin of these stories has

1. *Saundarananda*, IX. 18.

2. Kosambi, *The Enquiry*, No. 2, p. 10.

3. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 10. 26f.

4. *Ibid.*, V. 5.1.

5. Wilson in his translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Vol. IV, p. 275.

6. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 52.

7. *Mbh.* (vul), XVI. 7. 45f.

8. McCrindle, *Ancient Indian as described by Ptolemy*, p. 140.

9. *Vi. Pu.*, II. 3. 16 ; also see *Bhā. Pu.*, I. 10. 35.

10. Bhandarkar, op. cit., p. 53.

11. *Ibid.*



been rightly questioned by Raychaudhuri<sup>1</sup> and is now abandoned altogether on chronological grounds ; but his alternative suggestion<sup>2</sup> that the pastoral legends of Kṛṣṇa originated in Viṣṇu's description as a *gopa*, herdsman, in a Ṛgvedic hymn, rests on a weak basis. He, however, concedes<sup>3</sup> that these legends developed under the influence of some such tribe as that of the Ābhīras. In our opinion, the connection of the Ābhīras with the worship of Kṛṣṇa as a youthful boy-god is indisputable. In the *Padma Purāṇa* Viṣṇu is made to say that he would be born amongst the Ābhīras in his eighth incarnation<sup>4</sup>. The *Harivaṃśa*<sup>5</sup> and the *Bālacarita*<sup>6</sup> of Bhāsa state that Kṛṣṇa was brought up in a *ghoṣa*, and in the *Amarakośa*, Ābhīrapalli is a synonym for *ghoṣa*<sup>7</sup>. The work further enumerates Ābhīra and Ballava as synonyms for *gopa* and *gopāla*<sup>8</sup>. This shows that the Ābhīras were a wandering tribe of herdsmen. They lived originally in the Punjab but later advanced towards Rājputāna. In the first century A.D., they were living in the lower Indus valley, from where they migrated<sup>9</sup> to Saurāṣṭra and Aparānta in the Western Deccan. Their origin is still a matter of controversy. In the opinion of D. R. Bhandarkar<sup>10</sup>, D. C. Sircar<sup>11</sup>, and several other scholars<sup>12</sup>, the Ābhīras were a foreign tribe who came to India almost at the same time as the Scythians in the second century B.C. from some place in the Central Asia. D.C. Sircar connects them with Abiravan, a country lying midway between Herat and Kandahar. Their identification with a pastoral tribe known as Abeirai, living near Azerbaijan, has also been suggested<sup>13</sup>. But the theory of the foreign origin has been disputed by Mirashi<sup>14</sup>.

1. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 149, 151, 152f ; also see R. P. Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races*, pt. I, p. 83f.

2. Raychaudhuri, op. cit., pp. 46-7 ; 74 ; 148.

3. Ibid., p. 74.

4. *Padma Purāṇa*, *Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa*. V. 17. 1-19.

5. *Hariv.*, II. 7. 28f.

6. *Bālacarita*, p. 8.

7. *Amarakośa*, II. 2.21, Saradesai ed., p. 78.

8. Ibid., II. 9. 57 ; p. 212.

9. For a detailed study of their movements see Debala Mitra, 'The Ābhīras and their contribution to the Indian Culture', *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, Jaipur, 1951, p. 91f.

10. D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Indian Culture*, p. 62.

11. D. C. Sircar in AIU, p. 221f.

12. Cf. Debala Mitra, op. cit.

13. Ibid., p. 98-9.

14. Mirashi, CII, IV, p. xxxif.



and others<sup>1</sup>, who think that the Ābhīras were an aboriginal people living in the Punjab before the Āryans came. Since the earliest evidence of their existence in the north-west India is found in the *Mahābhārata* only, it is difficult to determine whether the passages in question reflect the conditions prevailing in the third-second century B.C. or at the time of the Bhārata war, but we may point out that the principal criticism of the theory of foreign origin, based on the evidence of Patañjali, is not valid. Patañjali speaks of the Ābhīras as a subcaste of the sūdras<sup>2</sup>; so it is argued<sup>3</sup> that the Ābhīras must have been living in India long before Patañjali to acquire a status in the caste system. But Patañjali speaks of the Śakas also, who were indisputably foreigners, as *aniravasita* (clean) sūdras<sup>4</sup>; it only shows that such passages of the *Mahābhāṣya* are nearer in date to the *Manusmṛti*, which assigns all such tribes, the Yavanas, Śakas, Pahlavas, Pāradas and Ābhīras, some place in the hierarchy of castes<sup>5</sup>. Thus, although we have nothing definite to support either of the two views, we may draw attention to a Deoghar relief which depicts Nanda and Yaśodā, the foster-parents of Kṛṣṇa, wearing, in the words of J. N. Banerjea<sup>6</sup>, “characteristically foreign” garments. This may indicate that the Gupta artists considered the herdsmen associated with Kṛṣṇa’s childhood as foreigners. However, we must remember that the Ābhīras, if they were alien intruders, must have come to India when the cult of Indra, although on the wane, was still important enough to have clashed against the worship of the cow-herd-god. It seems probable that Ābhīras came to India some time in the third century B.C. The *Divyāvadāna*<sup>7</sup> refers to two Ābhīra commoners of the time of Aśoka. One of these had the same disease as Aśoka, and was killed by Tiṣyarakṣitā, in an effort to find the cure; the other was the murderer of Vītaśoka<sup>8</sup>.

The Ābhīras seem to have been politically quite active in the Western Deccan under the Śaka Kṣatrapas and the Sātavāhanas in

1. Buddha Prakash, JBRS, XL, pp. 249-65; *Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1959, p. 103f; P. Banerjee, JBRS, Vol. XLI, p. 160f.
2. *Mahā.*, Vol. I, p. 252.
3. Mirashi, op. cit., p. xxxii.
4. On Pā., VI, 1. 94, *Mahā.*, III, p. 75.
5. SBE, XXV, p. 405.
6. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 422.
7. The *Divyāvadāna* is work of A.D. 100-200 as it speaks of gold *dināras*; but it may contain echoes of old historical events.
8. Debala Mitra, op. cit., p. 96, f.n. 46.



the early centuries of the Christian era<sup>1</sup>. An inscription of A.D. 181 found in northern Kaṭhiāwad speaks of a Senāpati Rudrabhūti, son of Senāpati Bāpaka, the Ābhīra<sup>2</sup>, and a Nāsik cave inscription refers to the Ābhīra king Īśvarasena, who is placed in the middle of the third century A.D.<sup>3</sup> It seems that it was about the beginning of the Christian era, or a little earlier, that the cult of the Ābhīra god was absorbed into Vāsudevism ; the suggestion<sup>4</sup> that the Ābhīra divinity was identified with the deified Sāttvata warrior some time in the third-fourth century A.D. ignores the sculptural evidence, which in our opinion suggests an earlier date for such a synthesis. A relief<sup>5</sup> in the Mathura school of art shows a male figure crossing a river, with an infant in a basket held in his hands over his head. A seven-hooded snake is depicted before the male figure leading towards the bank. The scene is identified as Vasudeva's crossing of the river Jamna with the baby-Kṛṣṇa to carry him to Gokula. The seven-hooded snake is evidently the serpent Śeṣa. It is pointed out<sup>6</sup> that according to the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* Śeṣa-nāga cleared the way for the smooth passage of the child-god. Stylistically the sculpture is ascribed to the early Kuṣāṇa period in the first century A.D. ; so it seems that the myth that Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, spent his childhood among the cow-herds, was already current in the early Kuṣāṇa period<sup>7</sup>.

The fusion of Kṛṣṇa with the Ābhīra god was rendered possible by the identical cultural complex of the two ; and this is very clearly brought home by the episode of Subhadrā's abduction. When Arjuna expresses his desire to marry her, Vāsudeva himself suggests that he should carry her away by force ; and to the angry Vṛṣṇi heroes he tells that the act of Arjuna is in accordance with the *dharma*<sup>8</sup>. Who would like to have a bride as a gift, as if she were an animal, he asks poignantly<sup>9</sup>. Apparently, this was the honourable method of acquiring wives among the Vṛṣṇis. Nor is it an isolated case ; Rukmiṇī, the chief queen of Kṛṣṇa, is acquired in the same way ; and Sāmba, the

1. D. C. Sircar, AIU, p. 221f.
2. EI, XVI, No. 17.
3. D. R. Bhandarkar, ASIAR, 1913-14, pp. 230-1 ; D. C. Sircar in AIU, p. 222 for the date.
4. Nanimadhab Chaudhuri, JBORS, XXVIII, 1942, p. 403.
5. D. R. Sahni, ASIAR, 1925-26, pp. 183-4, pl. LXVII, fig. c ; Agrawala, *Cat. Br. Im. Ma. Art*, p. 42 ; Banerjea, JISOA, XIV, p. 18.
6. Agrawala, *op. cit.*
7. R. C. Majumdar, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, III, p. 17.
8. *Mbh.*, I. 213.5.
9. *Ibid.*, v. 4.



son of Kṛṣṇa by Jāmbavatī, abducts the daughter of Duryodhana. The marriage customs of the Ābhīras also appear to have been similar. The Purāṇas tell us that after the destruction of the Yādavas, when Arjuna, escorting the women of the Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka tribes to Hastināpura, passes through the Pañcanada country, he is attacked by the Ābhīras who carry off all the Yādava women. This is how the Ābhīras acquire wives for themselves from the Vṛṣṇi and Andhaka tribes. These tribes must have lived together in close contact to have identified their deities completely.

The identification of Kṛṣṇa with the Ābhīra divinity appears to have been largely responsible for the introduction of such erotic elements in the Kṛṣṇa saga as his amorous dalliance with the gopis. The exigencies of a nomadic life required a greater freedom of sexes in the tribe, and the god they conceived of was Pan-like, youthful and frivolous. The *Harivaṃśa*<sup>1</sup> and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>2</sup> narrate Kṛṣṇa's sports with the milkmaids who are described as *rati-priyā*, fond of pleasures, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* further embellishes these stories. According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>3</sup> Kṛṣṇa enacted the *rāsa* in the company of the cowherd-maidens, and the *Hārivaṃśa*<sup>4</sup> and the *Bālacarita*<sup>5</sup> of Bhāsa refer to the performance of *hallīśa* or *hallisaka* dance by Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids. Śaṅkara, the commentator of the *Harṣacarita*, explains<sup>6</sup> that *rāsa* is a dance performed in a circle by eight, sixteen or thirty-two persons. The *hallīśa* also is a kind of circular dance, accompanied with singing, by one male and seven, eight or ten female performers<sup>7</sup>. The *Gāthāsaptasatī* of Hāla contains several poems referring to the tales of the god and the milkmaids,<sup>8</sup> but, their date is quite uncertain. Some Tamil poems, ascribed to the Śaṅgam age, also refer to the pastoral god and his amusements in the cow-settlement<sup>9</sup> ; and if these poems form a genuine part of the earliest Tamil literature, which was written between A. D. 100-300,<sup>10</sup> it would seem that the legends of Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids appeared

1. *Hariv.*, II, 20f.

2. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 13.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Hariv.*, op. cit.

5. *Balacarita* of Bhāsa, Act, III.

6. Quoted by V.S. Agrawala, *The Harṣacarita eka adhyayana*, p. 33, f. n.

7. S. V. *Hallīśam.*, Apte, SED.

8. *Gāthāsaptasatī*, vv. 112 ; 114 ; 128 ; 447 ; 655.

9. V.R.R. Dikshitar, *The Indian Culture*, IV, pp. 267-71.

10. Nilakanta Sastri, *History of South India*, p. 110.



almost at the same time in the South as in the North ; but the date of these works is still a matter of dispute and needs further investigation. The same may be said of the *Śilappadikāram* which mentions Kṛṣṇa, as Māyavan, and his wife Nappinai as being worshipped by the cow-herds and the milkmaids<sup>1</sup>. Apparently the pastoral legends of god Kṛṣṇa were quite popular among the people of South India. This phase of Kṛṣṇa's worship is extremely emotional and human. In the *Mahābhārata* Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu is sometimes recognised as the great generating force of the world since he is the creator, the supreme god. It is generally through Pradyumna, who is identified with Kāmadeva, the Indian Eros, that he is connected with the principle of generation, and in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharata Viṣṇu is recognised as the presiding deity of the erotics<sup>2</sup>. A passage of the *Anuśāsana Parva* states that the son of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī exists in all creatures, and that none can destroy him<sup>3</sup>. However, this recognition of the sexual urge as a great reproducing force has nothing to do with the stories of Kṛṣṇa's amatory amusements, which have a distinct pastoral setting and a romantic aura.

Conflicts with different cults and sectarian rivalries also contributed to the inflation of the Kṛṣṇa legends. The story of the killing of Pūtanā is one such instance. Pūtanā appears to have been a mother-goddess of dreadful nature who afflicted children<sup>4</sup>. She appears<sup>5</sup> among the attendant mothers of Skanda in the *Śalya Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*. She is identified with Āryā in the Āryāstava of the *Harivaṃśa*<sup>6</sup>. The *Paumacariya* mentions<sup>7</sup> Pautanapura (Poyaṇapura), the city of Pūtanā, in the Bharatakṣetra. Her worship came in clash with that of Kṛṣṇa in which the latter gained a decisive victory. The legends of Vṛndā and Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu are still more interesting. The Purāṇas refer to the shifting of Kṛṣṇa and the cow-herds from Gokula to the forests of Vṛndā ; and some later Purāṇas relate the seduction of Tulasī-Vṛndā, wife of the demon Jalandhara (or of nāga Śaṅkhacūḍa in some accounts) by Viṣṇu. The worship of Viṣṇu

1. A.K. Majumdar, 'A note on the development of the Rādhā cult', ABORI, XXXVI, p. 231f.

2. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, IV. 49.

3. *Mbh.*, XIII. 148. 20 ; XIV. 13. 12f.

4. A disease of children called Ahipūtanā is mentioned in the *Suśruta, Cikitsāsthāna* Adhyāya XX, v. 57-60. The *Suśruta* also speaks of Putanā, Andha Pūtanā and Sitapūtanā among the nine grahas afflicting children.

5. *Mbh.*, (vul), IX. 46.16.

6. *Hariv.*, Chitrashala Press, Poona ed., II. 3.22.

7. *Paumacariya*, V. 52 ; 227.



with Tulasī (basil) leaves is mentioned in the *Paṇḍarāraṇya*, an early Saṅgam work ; and in the popular tradition the Tulasī-plant goddess is married annually to Viṣṇu<sup>1</sup>. In our opinion, here is an instance of the worship of the mother-goddess of a grove coming to term with the cult of the pastoral god.

Then, there are tales told to extol and sometimes also to humiliate the rising divinity. The *Mahābhārata* relates how Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu performing a severe penance to please Śiva for obtaining a son. The account of Bāṇa's war with Kṛṣṇa and of Kārttikeya with Pradyumna is another such instance. The story of a false Vāsudeva, Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka, appears intriguing. It is mentioned in several Purāṇas<sup>2</sup>, and the *Mahābhārata*<sup>3</sup> refers to it. The legend may be recounted in brief. There was a king of the Puṇḍras, Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka, who, pretending to be the deity, adorned himself with all the characteristic marks and weapons of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu, and ordered the latter to stop using his name. Kṛṣṇa cut off his head with his discus Sudarśana. The king of Kāśī, who came to the aid of Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka, was also killed in the fight. His son propitiated the god Śaṅkara to create a *kṛtṭyā* for destroying Dvārakā, but the discus of Viṣṇu repelled the *kṛtṭyā* created by Śaṅkara and burnt down the city of Vārāṇasī. It is suggested<sup>4</sup> that the incident records the history of Kṛṣṇa's fight with the Śaivites who wore Puṇḍra mark and imitated the Bhāgavatas. In our opinion, Śaivism is represented in the story not by Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka but by the king of Kāśī and his son<sup>5</sup>. Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka is described<sup>6</sup> as bearing all the characteristic marks and weapons of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, *vaijayantī* garland, a discus, a club, a sword, a lotus, a bow and yellow clothes. Even his banner is marked with Garuḍa and his chest with Śrīvatsa. In short, he is the exact replica of the Vaiṣṇavite deity. We may suggest that Vāsudeva Pauṇḍraka stands for that form of the popular divinity which was worshipped by the Jainas. The Jainas have utilised profusely the rich legendary lore of the Vṛṣṇis and used it for their religious ends. A Jaina inscription of A.D. 113 discovered at

1. In the opinion of Kosambi it symbolises the ritual sacrifice of the husband of the mother-goddess who had to be married every year in accordance with the primitive matriarchal customs (*Myth And Reality*, pp. 57 ; 70-1.)
2. *Hariv.*, III. 91f. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 34 ; for other references see Tadpatrikar, 'The Kṛṣṇa Problem' ABORI, X, p. 316.
3. *Mbh.*, III. 14.8.
4. Tadpatrikar, op. cit.
5. Wilson, translation of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Vol. V, 128-9, f. n. 2.
6. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 34. 16-8.



Mathura records the dedication of the images of the deities Vāsudevas by a devotee of the Koliya gaṇa, the Brahmadāsika kula and the Ucenakari śākhā<sup>1</sup>. A passage<sup>2</sup> of the *Antagaḍa Dasāo* relates that when Vāsudeva of the Vṛṣṇis learnt of the tragic fate awaiting him and his clan he became very downcast. Then the saint Ariṭṭanemi consoled him, and said that in the Ussappinī age Vāsudeva would be born among the Puṇḍa (Puṇḍra) folk where, after fulfilling the period of a kevalī, he would attain salvation. This may be a reference to Paṇḍraka Vāsudeva of the brāhmaṇic tradition who according to the *Mahābhārata* was the king of the Puṇḍras, Vaṅgas and Kirātas<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that the popularity of Jainism among the Paṇḍras or Puṇḍras, who are sometimes also described as Paṇḍrakas<sup>4</sup> suggested the title Paṇḍraka of the false Vāsudeva to the Vaiṣṇavite priests. The Jaina Kalpasūtras enumerate four śākhās of the gaṇa founded by Godāsa, a disciple of Bhadrabāhu and one of these is Puṇḍravardhanīyā śākhā<sup>5</sup>. This shows that Puṇḍravardhana, the country of the Puṇḍras or Paṇḍrakas, was a prominent centre of Jainism.

The records of the Gupta period indicate that Kṛṣṇaite mythology was fully evolved and well-known. The Mandasor inscription of A.D. 404 states that with the coming of the rainy season, the festival of Indra began as it was “then (*i.e.* in the past) allowed by Kṛṣṇa”.<sup>6</sup> It seems to refer to the episode of the lifting of the mount Govardhana when Kṛṣṇa after subduing Indra allowed his worship to continue. However, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*<sup>7</sup> and the *Bṛhat Samhitā*<sup>8</sup> narrate a different myth in connection with the festival of Indra’s banner. It is stated that after being repeatedly vanquished by the Asuras, the gods headed by Indra approached Viṣṇu, who gave them his flagstaff which made Indra achieve victory over the demons. Indra gave the banner to the kings, who must celebrate the festival of raising Indra’s banner in order to gain victory over their enemies. The inscription may refer to either of the two myths. The Tusām rock

1. Lohuizen de Leeuw, *The Scythian Period*, p. 266.

2. *Antagaḍa Dasāo*, Barnett’s tr., pp. 81-2.

3. *Mbh.*, II. 13. 19.

4. B.C. Law, “The Puṇḍras of Ancient Bengal”, *J. Ind. Hist.*, XII, 1933 p. 350.

5. SBE, XXII, pp. 288-9.

6. *prāvṛṭkāle śubhe prāpte manastuṣṭikare nṛṇām. meghe pranṛtte śakkrasya kṛṣṇasyānumate tadā.* Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 377 verse 3 of the ins.

7. *Viṣṇudh*, II. 154.

8. *Br. Sam.*, 42. 1-7.



inscription of the fifth century A.D. describes Viṣṇu as "a mighty bee on the waterlily which is the face of Jāmbavatī."<sup>1</sup> Jāmbavatī was one of the queens of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, the mother of Sāmba, and the record proves complete identification of Viṣṇu with Kṛṣṇa. The sacred scriptures and classical works of this period also make frequent allusions to Kṛṣṇa legends. The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*<sup>2</sup> eulogises Kṛṣṇa in the form of a child and Kālidāsa refers to Viṣṇu in the form of a cowherd.<sup>3</sup> The *Mudrārākṣasa* describes Keśava as the destroyer of the horse-demon Keśin<sup>4</sup>.

Thus we see that it was through a process of synthesis and incorporation that a popular non-Āryan divinity came to be recognised as the most important and powerful human incarnation of the supreme god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.

### Śrī Lakṣmī

Śrī and Lakṣmī were originally two different goddesses merged together in the period represented by the Brāhmaṇas and early Upaniṣads.<sup>5</sup> The earliest text eulogising Śrī as a deity is the *Śrī-sūkta*, a supplement attached to the *Ṛgveda*, and it is held that the supplementary portions of the *Ṛgveda* were composed when the *Yajurveda* or the Brāhmaṇas were being written and compiled.<sup>6</sup> The *sūkta* does not differentiate between Śrī and Lakṣmī and invokes the goddess with both the names.<sup>7</sup> But their distinctive personalities are alluded to in the *Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā*, which speaks of them as the two wives of Puruṣa.<sup>8</sup> Later in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, the two wives of puruṣa are described as Hṛī and Śrī.<sup>9</sup> Traces of their separate identities may be discerned occasionally in the epics; and in the *Aranyakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>10</sup>, Rāvaṇa, struck by Sītā's beauty, asks her whether she is Śrī, Hṛī, Kīrtti or Lakṣmī or some apsara. Śrī and Lakṣmī are distinctly mentioned in a passage of the *Mahābhārata* which is now considered to be an interpolation.<sup>11</sup> The same epic also speaks of the

1. C II, III. No. 67, line 1.

2. *Jayā. Sam.*, II. 14.

3. *Meghadūta*, V. 15., B.S. Upadhyaya, *India in Kālidāsa*, p. 309.

4. *Mudrārākṣasa*, VI. 1. 1.

5. Gonda, *AEV*, p. 214.

6. Kashikar, *RV*, pp. 901-2.

7. *RV*, *Khilāni*, II. 6.

8. *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā*, XXXI. 22.

9. *Tai. Ar.*, III. 13.2.

10. *Rāmā.*, III. 46.17.

11. *Mbh.*, III. p. 127. 151\* after III. 38.25; Bombay ed., III. 37.33.



two goddesses as living in the palace of Indra along with Mahendrāṇī<sup>1</sup>. The *Nāṭya Śāstra*<sup>2</sup> of Bharata refers to Śrī and Lakṣmī and a number of other goddesses as divine mothers who are invoked for success. However, such passages are rare, and generally the two names, Śrī and Lakṣmī, are applied indiscriminately to the same divinity in the epics and other works. In the *Śānti Parva* Śrī says clearly that she is also known as Lakṣmī.<sup>3</sup>

The interpretation of the terms Lakṣmī and Śrī has been a matter of considerable speculation among scholars. Gonda explains the appellative Lakṣmī as mark, sign, token<sup>4</sup>, and concludes that Lakṣmī was originally the deity representing the “signs, evidence or prognostications (of luck and prosperity)”.<sup>5</sup> He points out that in the post-Vedic period Lakṣmī denoted ‘luck’, ‘fortune’ and this meaning of Lakṣmī was just developing in the Vedic texts from the original sense of ‘mark’, ‘sign’. The transition from the original connotation is quite comprehensible in our opinion, for the idea of luck in the Vedic age was related with material prosperity and well-being; the term *bhāgya*, which meant ‘something divisible’ or ‘entitled to share’, also denoted ‘luck’, ‘fortune’. As such the goddess of the signs of luck, Lakṣmī, very naturally came to be the goddess of wealth.

Gonda’s interpretation<sup>6</sup> of Śrī as ‘well-being’ and ‘prosperity’ seems to be more plausible than that of Oldenberg,<sup>7</sup> who takes it in the sense of ‘beauty’, ‘splendour’, especially in view of the Indian tradition which conceives Śrī as a goddess of wealth and plenty. In the opinion of several German scholars<sup>8</sup> Śrī was a fertility goddess of pre-Āryan origin. The *Śrī-sūkta*, which is described in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*<sup>9</sup> as *puṣṭi-vardhaka*, leading to an increase in prosperity or nourishment, fully substantiates this thesis. The *sūkta* describes her as of moist nature (*ārdrā*), ever-nourished (*nityapuṣṭā*) and abounding in dry cow-dung (*karīṣiṇī*). She is said to have produced offspring through *kardama* (slime, mire) and is invoked to dwell with *kardama* in the family of the worshippers. Waters are

1. *Mbh.*, II. 7·28.

2. *Nāṭya Śāstra*, III. 86f.

3. *Mbh.*, XII. 225·8.

4. Gonda, AEV, p. 215.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

6. Gonda, op. cit., p. 176f.

7. Quoted by Motichanda, JUPHS, XXI, 1948, p. 19-20.

8. For references see Gonda, op. cit., pp. 212-13.

9. *Viṣṇudh.*, II. 128. 2f.



requested to create moisture, and *ciklīta* (mire) along with the goddess is invited to live in the house of the devotee. She is described as living in a lotus (*padmesthitā*), of the colour of a lotus (*padma-varṇā*), wearing a garland of lotus (*padmamālinī*) and also as having the circumference of a lotus (*padmanemi*). In the opinion of Coomaraswamy<sup>1</sup> lotus is a symbol of waters and as such connected with fertility. The deity is invoked to destroy *alakṣmī*<sup>2</sup>, bad luck, poverty, and to bestow cattle and progeny. She is connected with vegetation, and the *bilva* (wood-apple) tree is especially hers<sup>3</sup>. Gonda writes that the *sūkta* depicts her as the guardian deity of the farmer<sup>4</sup>. Iconographically, she is sometimes represented as standing in the midst of a group of trees<sup>5</sup>. The conception of a female divinity connected with productivity is a common feature found in most ancient societies; Demeter of Greece and Isis of Egypt may be cited as analogous instances. It is now generally conceded<sup>6</sup> that agriculture was a discovery of women; they carried on the work of garden tillage by means of the hoe before the use of the plough led to field cultivation and transferred it to men. It is remarkable that in India Śrī-Lakṣmī is intimately associated with vegetation and fecundity, but the emblem of the plough is assigned to a male god, Saṅkarṣaṇa.

Although both the names Śrī and Lakṣmī are derived from Sanskrit roots, some of the fundamental features of the goddess point to her non-Āryan or pre-Āryan character, and it is possible that the terms were applied to the popular divinity after her Aryanisation. A few of the earliest representations of Śrī-Lakṣmī depict her in the Gaja-Lakṣmī form. The goddess is portrayed standing or seated on a lotus between two elephants, each standing on either side pouring water from a jar on the deity with his upraised trunk. The type occurs on early reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodh-Gaya. One of the rock-cut caves at Pitalkhora in the Aurangabad district of *Mahārāshtra* contains a sculpture showing the Gaja-Lakṣmī scene datable in the second-first century B.C.<sup>7</sup> The *Śrī-sūkta* describes her as exulting

1. Coomaraswamy, *The Eastern Art*, I. p. 178.

2. RV, *Khilāni*, II. 6.5.

3. Ibid., v. 6.

4. Gonda, AEV, p. 214; cf. *Msm.*, V. 120.

5. ASIAR, 1903-04, p. 107, seal no. 3.

6. Will Durant, *The Life of Greece*, p. 178; Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens*, p. 10; also see ERE, I, p. 227.

7. *Anc. Ind*, No. 15, pp. 70, 80.



at the sound of elephants (*hastināda-promodanī*).<sup>1</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* states that when the goddess came out of the ocean, the elephants of the quarters bathed her with pure waters contained in the vases of gold.<sup>2</sup> Her association with elephants appears significant. We may point out that the elephant is called a 'nāga' in Sanskrit, and the term also means a cobra. In our opinion, the pre-Āryan goddess of fertility represented in the midst of two nāgas (elephants) is of nāga origin. The Buddhist mythology, which is derived from the popular lore, speaks of Śrī as the daughter of Sāgara (Ocean), a nāga king.<sup>3</sup> This shows that in popular tales Śrī was connected with the nāgas. There has been considerable fusion of the nāga elements in the Āryan society. It is suggested<sup>4</sup> that the nāgas were aboriginal tribes on the Āryan periphery and the story of the Bhārata war is based on the non-Āryan or pre-Āryan nāga legends, the city of Hastināpura signifying the city of the nāgas. The cult of the mother-goddess might have been taken over from these autochthonous tribes. According to a *Mahābhārata* account<sup>5</sup>, Śrī originally lived with the asuras, abandoned them on their degradation and ultimately came to live with Indra. The myth evidently refers to her non-Āryan origin and subsequent adoption among Āryan deities. We may note that in a Sundanese legend<sup>6</sup> Śrī is said to have been born from a tear of Dewa Anta or Antaboga (Anantabhoga), the nāga Ananta of the nether worlds. The *Mānava Gr̥hya Sūtra* contains a hymn invoking the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī to come to the worshipper in the company of the nāgas and the deities<sup>7</sup>. Thus the Gaja-Lakṣmī scene may refer to the fertilising of a female divinity of nāga genesis.

As the goddess of wealth and abundance, Śrī is closely related with the kine. The *Śrī-sūkta* calls her *hariṇī*<sup>8</sup>, of the form of a deer, and on some of the Kuṇinda coins of the first century B.C. she appears with a deer by her side<sup>9</sup>. In the *Mahābhārata*<sup>10</sup> Śrī tells

1. *Śrī-sūkta*, v. 3.
2. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 9. 102.
3. *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, XI. 48-51 ; SBE, XXI, p. 250f.
4. For this and some other arguments, see Kosambi, ISIH, pp. 121-4.
5. *Mbh.*, XII. 218.
6. Gonda, op. cit., p. 221.
7. *Upoyantu mām devagaṇāḥ nāgāśca tapasā saha. Mānava Gr̥. Sū.*, II. 13. GOS ed., p. 178.
8. Op. cit., v. 1.
9. Allan, BMCCAI, p. cif ; 159-168
10. *Mbh.*, XII. 221. 60f.



Indra that one of the reasons why she left the asuras is that they now do not look after their cattle and neglect giving them pasture grass and proper food. They indulge in meat-eating and kill the cattle not for sacrifices but to eat their flesh. At another place she speaks to Rukmiṇī that she lives among those who honour the kine, brāhmaṇas and gods and worship them with flowers<sup>1</sup>. Her insistence on non-killing may be due to the later principle of *ahimsā* or non-violence ; but her concern for cattle may be an ancient trait.

The concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī as a fertility goddess may be traced in the epics and Purāṇas also. In the *Anuśāsana Parva*, Śrī is said to dwell in the urine and the dung of the kine.<sup>2</sup> According to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>3</sup> her insignia is lotus. As Rukmiṇī she is the mother of the crocodile-bannered Pradyumna who is identical with Kāmadeva, the Indian Eros.<sup>4</sup> Her generative character is fully brought out in her images. An icon found at Mathura, and now preserved in the Lucknow Museum, shows her standing in the midst of lotus plants issuing from a *pūrṇaghata* (full jar) and pressing her right breast with the left hand.<sup>5</sup> The same posture is depicted in the Gaja-Lakṣmī figure carved in a railing of the Bharhut stūpa.

Gonda has collected sufficient evidence to show that Śrī is intimately associated with vegetative life in the Indian Archipelago.<sup>6</sup> In Bali island she is connected with the origin and [cultivation of rice, the *Śrīstava* calls her *śrītāṇḍulī* and *dhānyarājñī*, the goddess of rice and corn.<sup>7</sup> Gonda disagrees<sup>8</sup> with scholars who think the connection of the deity with rice in Indonesia as a late and indigenous development. According to a Balinese legend<sup>9</sup> Śrīdevī is the name of the rice cut but not yet thrashed, Umādevī of the rice seed, Girinātha of young plant and Gangādevī of the rice-plantation ; the whole scheme sounds quite artificial and arbitrary, and without agreeing fully with Gonda's view, we may state that it was Śrī's original close relation with vegetation and fertility which led] to her identification with a

1. *Mbh.*, XIII. 11. 18.

2. *Mbh.*, XIII. 82. 24.

3. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 94. 39.

4. *Mbh.*, XIII. 11. 3 ; Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 177.

5. Agrawala, *Cat. Br. Im. Ma. Art.* pp. x-xi.

6. Gonda, *AEV*, p. 220-2.

7. S. Levi, *Sanskṛt Texts From Bali*, p. xxviii, 69.

8. Gonda, op. cit., p. 222.

9. S. Levi, op. cit., p. xxviii.



local goddess whose agrarian character once again illustrates the connection of women with agriculture.

The deity related with fecundity and propagation would naturally be popular among the herdsmen-agriculturist masses who comprised the third varṇa of the Āryan society, and in the *Br̥hat Saṃhitā*<sup>1</sup> of Varāhamihira the *bilva* tree which is also called Śrīvṛkṣa (the tree of the goddess Śrī) is considered auspicious for the vaiśya caste. The Buddhist sources also invariably associate Śrī with the vaiśyas. Merchants and traders, who were mostly drawn from this class, often bear the names connected with Śrī, and such names are very common in the Buddhist votive inscriptions of the 2nd-1st Century B.C. A Sanchi stūpa inscription<sup>2</sup> edited by Bühler records the gift of a merchant (*vaṇija*) Śrīgupta, and another inscription<sup>3</sup> speaks of Śrīpāla, the son of a trader. An Amarāvati Buddhist pillar inscription records<sup>4</sup> the gift of a *padhānamaḍava* (chief pavilion) by the vaiśya (*Vaṇija*) Siridata (Śrīdatta). The Jātakas also associate Śrī with merchants and traders. In the *Sirikālakaṇṇi Jātaka* the merchant Suciparivāra honours Śrī and drives away Kālakaṇṇi of Kālī<sup>5</sup>. In the *Mahā Umagga Jātaka*<sup>6</sup> the merchant of Mithilā bears the name Sirivaddhaka, and a banker (*śreṣṭhī*) Śrīdāsa is mentioned on the Basārḥ seals<sup>7</sup>. Some of these cultivators and food-producers turn to trade with the commodity surplus, and the fertility deity of abundance becomes in due course the presiding deity of trade and commerce (*vāṇijyaśrī*).

Once Śrī-Lakṣmī came to be accepted as the goddess of wealth and plenty, her cult was bound to attract all sections of people, and although the vaiśya caste continues to be associated with her in greater measure till the present day<sup>8</sup>, her worship became popular with all classes of society. However, in accordance with the spirit of the times, her imagery also came to reflect the varṇa ideas of the day. The *Mahābhārata* speaks of Kṛṣṇa's encounter with the ṛṣis,

1. Varāhamihira, *Br. Sam.*, 58. 6.

2. EI, II, No. VIII. 47.

3. Ibid., ins. No. 176.

4. Lūders List, No. 1230.

5. Cowell, *The Jātakas*, No. 382.

6. Ibid., No. 546.

7. ASIAR, 1903-4, seal Nos. 45 ; 110.

8. According to a popular legend Viṣṇu assigned the festival of *kaumudīmahotsava* to vaiśyas in honour of the goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī. See B.A. Gupte, *The Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials*, p. 36f.



who were endued with *brāhmī Śrī* or holy lustre, when he was going on a journey<sup>1</sup>. The concept is given a concrete form in the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara Purāṇa*<sup>2</sup>, which lays down instructions for the making of the images of *Brāhmī-Lakṣmī* and *Rāja-Śrī* beside the principal image of *Śrī-Lakṣmī*. Other forms of the goddess were also conceived of, and the images of *Svarga-Lakṣmī* and *Jaya-Lakṣmī* are also required to be established in the same shrine. According to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*<sup>3</sup> whoever performs the *Śrāddha* on a *daśamī* day gains *Brāhmī-Śrī*. The *Parama Saṃhitā*<sup>4</sup> states that one who wishes to attain the wealth of learning must worship *Brahma-Śrī* and offer oblations with white lotuses, and one who desires to obtain *Kṣātriya-Śrī* must offer red lotuses. On some of the Gupta coins *Śrī-Lakṣmī* is depicted as holding a ribbon or a towel<sup>5</sup>. Evidently the deity is represented in her *Rāja-Lakṣmī* aspect. The corona with a long ribbon is a symbol of royalty; a deity holding a corona with long ribbon often appears on Sassanian coins and sculptures.<sup>6</sup> We do not hear of the *śūdras* in connection with *Śrī-Lakṣmī*, evidently because it was inconceivable that a *śūdra* may possess wealth of any kind<sup>7</sup>; but the varied forms of the goddess testify to her immense popularity.

Representations of *Śrī-Lakṣmī* are among the earliest devices found on ancient Indian coins. A coin of king *Sujeṣṭha*, identified with the *Suṅga* king *Sujyeṣṭha* or *Jyeṣṭhamitra*, bears on the reverse the figure of the goddess standing on a lotus holding a flower in her right hand. An elephant stands on each side on a lotus and pours water on her from a vessel held in his trunk<sup>8</sup>. Variants of the same *Gaja-Lakṣmī* device occur on the coins of *Vāyudeva*, *Viśākhadeva* and *Śivadatta*, the kings of *Ayodhyā*.<sup>9</sup> These are assigned to the first century B.C.<sup>10</sup> The coins of *Gomitra*, *Brahmamitra*, *Ghoṣadatta*, *Dṛdhamitra* and others found at *Mathura* of approximately the same

1. *Mbh.*, V. 83.60 ; Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 178.

2. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 82. Stella Kramerisch's tr., p. 107.

3. *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, III. 17. 15.

4. *Para. Sam.*, XV. 30-1.

5. Motichandra, JUPHS, XXI, 1948, p. 27.

6. MASI, No. 38, p. 29.

7. The *Manu-smṛti* states that the possession of wealth by a *śūdra* gives pain to a *brāhmaṇa*. *Mṣm.*, X. 129.

8. Ajita Ghose, JNSI, XVI, p. 59-60.

9. Allan, BMCCAI, p. 130-1.

10. D.C. Sircar, AIU, pp. 173-4.



date show her simply standing with a lotus in the right hand.<sup>1</sup> She appears to have been popular with Śaka rulers also. Lakṣmī replaces the Greek goddess Pallas on the coins of Mahākṣatrapa Rañjuvula, and some of the coins of Rañjuvula and Śoḍāsa bear her figure on both the sides.<sup>2</sup> On the obverse she stands facing between two symbols; on the reverse is depicted the famous Gaja-Lakṣmī scene, which is sometimes also taken as a reference to the coronation scene.<sup>3</sup> The deity appears on the coins of Azilises, Azes II and Hagāmaṣa;<sup>4</sup> her worship seems to have gained impetus from the foreigners who were fast becoming Indianised, identifying their own divinities with those of the popular pantheon.

However, in the early centuries preceding and following the Christian era Śrī-Lakṣmī appears to have been worshipped in her own right, quite unallied with any other sectarian cult, and as such was worshipped by the people of all sects alike. Patañjali refers to her several times<sup>5</sup>. She figures four times in the Bhārhut sculptures, and goddess Sirimā represented on the stūpa of Bhārhut, holding a bunch of lotuses, seems to be a variation of hers<sup>6</sup>. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* prescribes her invocation<sup>7</sup>. It is often contended that Śrī-Lakṣmī did not have a cult of her own the way Viṣṇu, Śiva and others had<sup>8</sup>, but a passage of the *Milinda Pañho* appears to discredit this view. It states that the secrets of the followers of the mystical cults of the Sun and the Moon, of the goddess of fortune, and of some other deities, remain hidden in the respective sects only<sup>9</sup>.

There are many legends concerning the origin of Śrī-Lakṣmī, which, in itself, is a proof of her popularity. According to the Buddhist tradition Śrī is the daughter of Dhātaraṭṭa, the king of the north. The *Mahābhārata* contains several accounts of her origin<sup>10</sup>.

1. Allan, op. cit., p. 170f.
2. Jenkins, JNSI, XVIII, pt. ii, Monograph No. 4, 'Coin types of the Śaka-Pahlava kings', pp. 30-1.
3. C. Sivaramamurti, JUPHS, XIV, pt. i, p. 22.
4. Jenkins, op. cit., pp. 9, 14 and 29.
5. Pat., on Pā. I. 4.3 ; for other references see Pathak and Chitrao, *The Word Index of Patañjali*, p. 1033.
6. H.D. Bhattacharjee, in AIU, p. 470.
7. For this and some other references in the Buddhist works see Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.177; B.C. Law, *India as described in early texts of Buddhism and Jainism*, p.204.
8. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 370.
9. SBE, XXXV, p. 266 ; *Milinda Pañho*, IV. 4.6.
10. Carpenter, *Theism in Mediaeval India*, p.279.



One of these makes her the daughter of Brahmā and the mother of the two sky-going horses Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ<sup>1</sup>. This seems to be a continuation of the earlier tradition recorded in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which made her the daughter of Prajāpati.<sup>2</sup> The same *Mahābhārata* account also states that Lakṣmī is one of the ten daughters of Dakṣa given in marriage to Dharma.<sup>3</sup> The legend is retold in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>4</sup> and the *Viṣṇudharmottara*,<sup>5</sup> where the number of daughters given in marriage to Dharma increases from ten to thirteen and fourteen respectively. Darpa is Lakṣmī's son born of this union.<sup>6</sup>

The best known account of Śrī-Lakṣmī's origin is given in the *Ādi Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>7</sup> which narrates the myth of the churning of the ocean. Śrī clad in white garment came out of the sea along with moon (soma), wine (*surā*), the white steeds, the jewel Kaustubha and Dhanvantari who carried the nectar-pot in his hand. Although the account exhibits a strong Vaiṣṇavite bias, the churning could be carried on only when Viṣṇu gave his energy and blessings to the gods, it does not yet connect Śrī with Viṣṇu. This is done later in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>8</sup> where Śrī is said to have gone to Viṣṇu of her own accord. The *Mahābhārata* contains several passages indicating her association with other gods before she was finally united with Viṣṇu.

We have referred to a few passages allying Śrī to Indra ; her assimilation into the Āryan pantheon must have occurred at a time when Indra was still the mightiest of all gods. In a passage of the *Mahābhārata* the polyandry of Draupadī is justified on the ground that Draupadī was an incarnation of Śrī and the five Pāṇḍavas of former Indras.<sup>9</sup> In the *Śānti Parva*<sup>10</sup> account when Śrī came away

1. *Mbn.*, I. 60.50; but in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, she is the sister of Dhātā and Vidhātā. *Vi. Pu.* ; I. 8.15; 10.2.
2. *Śat. Br.*, XI. 4.3.1. Refer Gonda, op. cit., p.223.
3. *Mbh.*, I. 60.13.
4. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 7.23.
5. *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 107.90-94.
6. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 7.28.
7. *Mbh.*, I. 16. 34-6
8. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 9. 105. also see *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 41.1.
9. *Mbh.*, I. 189. 29, 33.
10. *Ibid.*, XII, ch. 218.



from the asuras to live with Indra, Indra is said to have apportioned one quarter of her essence to dwell in the earth, another in the waters, the third in the fire, and the fourth in good men who were devoted to the brāhmaṇas and were truthful in speech. The same tale is retold a little later<sup>1</sup> in a characteristic Vaiṣṇavite setting. Śrī came to Indra riding on Viṣṇu's vehicle, adorned with Garuḍa and the sun<sup>2</sup>, attended by many apsarases of exquisite beauty. Nārada, the great devotee of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, was present at their meeting.

Śrī-Lakṣmī's association with Kubera, the god of wealth and riches, appears to have been no less ancient. If the explanation of the commentator is accepted, the seventh hymn<sup>3</sup> of the *Śrī-sūkta*, which is a genuine portion of the *sūkta* and is found in all the editions of the *Ṛgveda*, connects Śrī with Kubera. The worshipper implores the goddess to come to him with Devasakha (Kubera), Kīrtti, and Maṇi (Maṇibhadra, the treasurer of Kubera). The *Rāmāyaṇa* states that the same imperishable Lakṣmī as dwells with Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera), Moon, and Indra, lived in the palace of Rāvaṇa<sup>4</sup>. The *Mahābhārata* describes her as attending the court of Kubera, and the god is described<sup>5</sup> at another place<sup>6</sup> as united with Lakṣmī. In some other passages she is explicitly mentioned as his wife.<sup>7</sup> On certain seals from Basārh<sup>8</sup> Śrī-Lakṣmī is shown with two dwarfish attendants holding money bags. Bloch thought the attendants were Kuberas, but Banerjea identifies them with Yakṣas<sup>9</sup>. In any case her connection with Kubera the lord of the Yakṣas is apparent. The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*<sup>10</sup> speaks of Lakṣmī as the presiding deity of the eight treasures which are invariably connected with Kubera ; and if Weller's interpretation<sup>11</sup> is accepted, Aśvaghoṣa, the Buddhist writer who has

1. Ibid., ch. 221.

2. Ibid., vs. 11-13.

3. *upetu mām devasakhaḥ kīrttiśca maṇinā saha*, ṚV, II, 6.7 : see S.B. Dasgupta, *Śrī-Rādhā kā krama vikāsa*, pp. 15-8.

4. *Rāmā.*, V. 9.8.

5. *Mbh.*, II. 10-18.

6. Ibid., III. 164.13 ; Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 143.

7. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p.372 ; Hopkins, op. cit.

8. ASIAR, 1903-4, seal nos. 3, 5, 6, 9, 22.

9. Banerjea, DHI, I ed., p. 210.

10. *Mārka. Pu.* 68.4.

11. Quoted by Johnston, *Buddhacarita*, pt. II, p.2, f.n. Weller's rendering is supported by the context.



a keen knowledge of brāhmaṇical lore, speaks of Śrī as the wife of Vaiśravaṇa. Johnston waves off this interpretation simply on the ground that Śrī is not known to be the wife of Kubera. However, we have seen that Śrī is often allied with Vaiśravaṇa in ancient texts ; so we need not reject Weller's translation, which is based on the more reliable Tibetan version than the one used by Cowell<sup>1</sup>. Several sculptures of the Kuṣāṇa period provide definite evidence of the worship of Lakṣmī with Kubera. A Kuṣāṇa statuette from Mathura shows Lakṣmī holding a lotus, Bhadrā holding a fruit, and Hārītī a child, with Kubera as the fourth figure<sup>2</sup>. Another<sup>3</sup> of nearly the same date represents Kubera holding a cup and two female divinities seated in front by his side. One of the goddesses holds a lotus and is identified with Lakṣmī. A small slab<sup>4</sup> of the early Kuṣāṇa period depicts four brāhmaṇical deities in a group, Ardhanārīśvara Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaja-Lakṣmī and Kubera. The sculpture is an example of the syncretistic movement set afoot in the Kuṣāṇa age; it was caused, perhaps, not so much by the eclectic tendencies of the Kuṣāṇa or other foreign rulers, as is often presumed<sup>5</sup>, but by the fact that brāhmaṇism was reasserting itself through these cults, and these cults had come to acquire identical social contents under the influence of brāhmaṇical rules of social and moral ethics. The sculpture may also mark the first step towards the union of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu.

Nevertheless, Śrī-Lakṣmī was at one time also linked with the god Kārttikeya. A silver coin of the tribal republic of the Yaudheyas, published by Allan and classified by him among the class III types, shows the figure of the six-headed Kārttikeya holding a spear on the obverse and the goddess Lakṣmī standing on a lotus on the reverse<sup>6</sup>. This class of coinage is assigned to the late second century A.D.<sup>7</sup> The goddess is sometimes replaced by a deer on certain varieties of the Yaudheya coins<sup>8</sup>, which bear a close resemblance

1. Johnston writes that the Tibetan translator made a word for word rendering even when it did not give good sense. See Johnston, *op. cit.*, introduction p.x.

2. Agrawala, *Cat. Br. Im. Art*, p.x—xi, No. o.241.

3. *Ibid.*, No. C. 30.

4. *Ibid.*, p. ix ; 41, No. 2520.

5. Banerjea, *DHI*, II ed, p. 125 ; *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 332f.

6. Allan, *BMCCAI*, p. 270.

7. *Ibid.*, p. cliii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 273 ; also see *JNSI*, XVIII, pt. ii, pp. 46-8.



to the Kuṇḍa coins of approximately the same date showing a figure of Śiva on the obverse and a deer on the reverse<sup>1</sup>. The deer perhaps represents the theriomorphic form of the same goddess, and as we have noted earlier, Lakṣmī appears on a lotus with a deer by her side on some of the Kuṇḍa coins of the first century B.C.<sup>2</sup> On some of the Yaudheya coins belonging to class III of Allan's classification, a figure of the six-headed Kārttikeya appears on the obverse and a corresponding six-headed goddess on the reverse. V.S. Agrawala identifies her with Ṣaṣṭhī.<sup>3</sup> In the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* Devasenā, the wife of Skanda, is designated as Ṣaṣṭhī, Lakṣmī, Āśā, Sinivālī and Kuhū<sup>4</sup>. The identification of Śrī-Lakṣmī with Ṣaṣṭhī and her association with Kārttikeya in this passage is not casual; a little earlier in the same chapter the god is explicitly mentioned to have obtained Śrī of the form of a lotus (*padmarūpā*) who, assuming a corporeal form, came to him of her own accord<sup>5</sup>. It is further stated that when Skanda married Devasenā, Lakṣmī herself in her incarnate form dwelt with him.<sup>6</sup> As Skanda was united with Śrī on the fifth lunar day, it came to be known as Śrī-Pañcamī; as he attained his objective on the sixth, *ṣaṣṭhī* or the sixth day of lunation is known as *mahātithi*, literally, a great date<sup>7</sup>. In the Purāṇas Śrī-Pañcamī<sup>8</sup> is a sacred festival dedicated to the worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī; and the *Gr̥hyasūtras* contain instructions for the performance of Śrī-kalpa and Ṣaṣṭhī-kalpa, ritual ceremonies performed in the honour of Śrī and Ṣaṣṭhī on the fifth and the sixth lunar day of the bright fortnight respectively<sup>9</sup>. The *Mānava Gr̥hya Sūtra* prescribes the use of *Śrī-sūkta* hymns in the Ṣaṣṭhī-kalpa, and the goddess is described as Śrī, Hṛī, Lakṣmī, Upa-Lakṣmī, Nandā, Haridrā, Ṣaṣṭhī, Jayā and Kāmā. Ṣaṣṭhī is

1. Allan, op. cit., pp. ciii ; 167.

2. Ibid., p. cif.

3. JNSI, V, p. 29.

4. *Mbh.*, III, 218. 47.

5. *tatastam varṇam śūram yuvānam-mṛṣṭakuṇḍalam abhajat padmarūpā śrīḥ svyameva śarīriṇī*. Ibid., v. 3.

6. Ibid., v. 48.

7. Ibid., v. 49.

8. For the festival of Śrī-pañcamī, see Wilson, *Essays on the Religion of the Hindus*, Vol. II, p. 187f.

9. *Baudh Gr̥. Śsū.*, III. 5; *Mānava Gr̥. Sū.*, II. 13 ; Ramagopal, *India in the Vedic Kalpasūtras*, pp. 466-7.



invoked to grant wealth and prosperity<sup>1</sup>, and the *Baudhāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* identifies her with Śrī<sup>2</sup>. Thus the numismatic evidence finds full corroboration in the *Mahābhārata* and the late *Gr̥hya Sūtras*. We may state that the six-headed goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, who is especially associated with new-born children, was connected with the six-headed child-god Kumāra Kārttikeya, and her identification with Śrī-Lakṣmī led to the latter's union with Skanda.

The Kānākhera stone inscription<sup>3</sup> mentions a Mahādaṇḍanāyaka Śrīdhara-varman, son of Śaka Nanda, and describes him as a great devotee of Svāmi-Mahāsenā (*svāmi mahāsenā mahābhaktasya*).<sup>4</sup> The record refers to his thirteenth regnal year and is dated in the year 201 or 241 of the Śaka era<sup>5</sup> and should thus be assigned to the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth century A.D. In view of the proclaimed devotion of the Mahādaṇḍanāyaka to the god Kārttikeya, his name Śrīdhara-varman appears significant. Very probably it refers to his favourite god Mahāsenā as united with Śrī.

Śrī-Lakṣmī's recognition as the consort of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is the latest feature of her legends in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Bhagavadgīta* she is reckoned as a manifestation of Viṣṇu among women along with Kīrti, Vāk, Smṛti, Medhā, Dhṛti, and Kṣamā, the personified abstractions<sup>6</sup>. The passage may not be of particular significance, as in this chapter the supreme god is identified with the best in every class of beings<sup>7</sup>. The *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra*<sup>8</sup> recounts Śrī, Sarasvatī, Tuṣṭi and Puṣṭi as the goddesses of the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. Śrī is directly associated with Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu in the *Rājadharmā* section of the *Śānti Parva*, which narrates<sup>9</sup> that the goddess was born from a golden coloured lotus which sprang from Viṣṇu's forehead. She was married to Dharma and had a son named Artha. All the three, Dharma, Artha, and Śrī were established in sovereignty. Although here the poet evidently uses a myth to explain the abstract

1. *Mānava Gr̥. Sū.*, op. cit.

2. *Baudh. Gr̥. Sū.*, III. 7. 17.

3. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 180-1.

4. Ibid., line 1 of the inscription.

5. Ibid., f.n. 11 ; also see Sircar, in AIU, pp. 188-9.

6. *Bhg.*, X. 34 ; also see *Visnudh.*, I. 56-31.

7. Thus the godhead is described as Śaṅkara among the Rudras, *Bhg.*, X. 23.

8. *Baudh. Dh. Sū.*, II, 5.9.10.

9. *Mbh.*, XII. 59. 131-4.



ideas of *dharma* (duty, justice), *artha* (riches) and *śrī* (wealth, abundance) and their connections with sovereign authority, the story of Śrī's birth from a lotus sprouting from Viṣṇu's forehead apparently has in view the personal, lotus-born, popular deity who is thus brought in relation with Viṣṇu, and seems to mark the first step towards their companionship. Often in the same epic Śrī is described as the wife of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu or his man-incarnation, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa.<sup>1</sup> Rukmiṇī saw her sitting on the lap of Nārāyaṇa, shining with the hue of a lotus.<sup>2</sup> Śrī told<sup>3</sup> Rukmiṇī that she dwelt in rivers, lotuses, bulls, elephants, maidens, ruling sovereigns and good men; she did not live with those who caused intermixture of castes and neglected their varṇa duties. But everywhere else she lived only in spirit; with Nārāyaṇa she lived in her embodied form.<sup>4</sup> The *Rāmāyaṇa* also refers to her as the wife of Viṣṇu.<sup>5</sup> The *Amarakośa*<sup>6</sup> mentions Śrīpati, the husband of Śrī, as the name of Viṣṇu, and Haripriyā, the beloved of the god Hari (Viṣṇu), as that of Lakṣmī. In the list of Viṣṇu's one thousand names<sup>7</sup>, Viṣṇu is described as Śrīmān (three times), Śrīnivāsa (twice), Lakṣmī, Lakṣmīvān, Śrīpati, Śrīmatāmbara, Śrīśa, Śrīvāsa, Śrīda, Śrīnidhi, Śrīvibhāvana, Śrīdhara, and Śrīkara. The names, which were enjoined to be muttered daily, prove the importance of Śrī in the cult of Viṣṇu.

Śrī's union with Nārāyaṇa reaches its consummation in the Purāṇas. According to a legend mentioned in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>8</sup> and repeated in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*,<sup>9</sup> Śrī was the daughter of Bhṛgu and Khyāti who gave her in marriage to Nārāyaṇa.<sup>10</sup> The worship of Śrīdhara with Śrī and of Janārdana with Lakṣmī is for the first time prescribed in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>11</sup>, and the goddess is

1. *Mbh.*, I. 55. 34 ; 191.6.

2. *Ibid.*, XIII. 11.3.

3. *Ibid.*, vv. 6f.

4. *sarveṇa bhāvena śarīrabhūtā.*, *ibid.*, v. 20-21.

5. *Rāmā.*, II. 118.20.

6. *Amarakośa*, I. 1.18f ; I 1.27f.

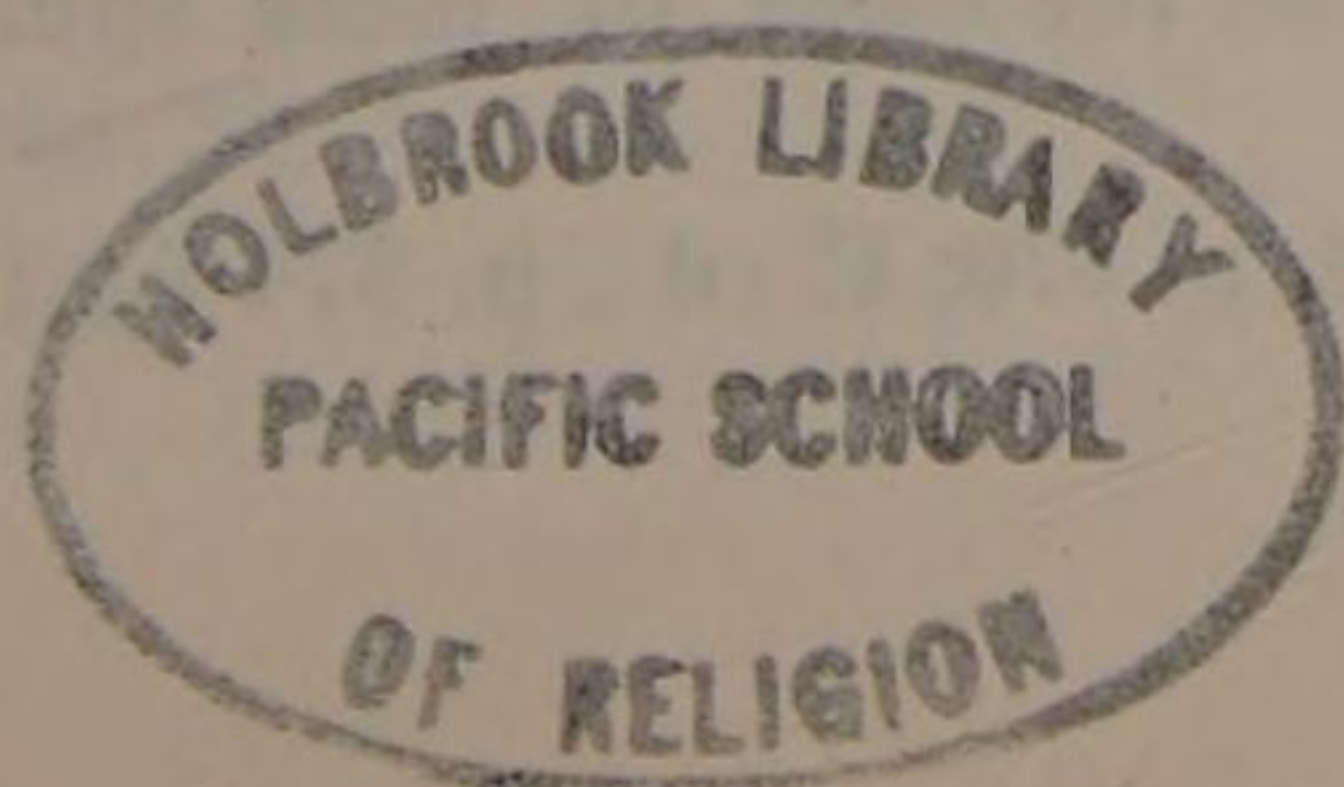
7. *Mbh.*, XIII. 149.

8. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 8. 15; 10.2.

9. *Viṣṇudh.*, 107. 72f.

10. *Supra*, p. 10.

11. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 216.





said to dwell in the breast of Viṣṇu<sup>1</sup>. The work further recommends the giving away of the gifts dedicated to Śrī-Lakṣmī to those who are well-versed in the Pañcarātra<sup>2</sup>. The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*, a Pañcarātra work, describes Viṣṇu as Kamalākāmuka (lover of Lakṣmī) and Lakṣmīvallabha (Lakṣmī's beloved)<sup>3</sup>.

The evidence of the epics and the Purāṇas suggests that Lakṣmī was adopted into the Vaiṣṇava pantheon during the period of the composition of the younger parts of the *Mahābhārata* and the early Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas, that is, some time in the third-fourth centuries A.D. The *Śrī-sūkta* hymns after the first fifteen, linking her with Viṣṇu in Max Müller's edition of the *Rgveda*<sup>4</sup>, are very late interpolations, certainly post-Gupta. The sixteenth verse is a *phalaśruti* (the closing verse relating the reward to be obtained by the recitation of the afore-mentioned hymns), which clearly establishes the spuriousness of the following verses. The Kāśmīr version of the *Rgveda*<sup>5</sup> does not contain these hymns. The *Baudhāyāna Gṛhya-Śeṣasūtra*<sup>6</sup>, the *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>7</sup> and the *Agni Purāṇa*<sup>8</sup> refer to only the first fifteen verses, which are totally silent about Lakṣmī's connections with Viṣṇu<sup>9</sup>. At any rate there is no justification, in our opinion, for the contention<sup>10</sup> of J. N. Banerjea that Śrī was an object of worship in a Pañcarātra shrine as early as the 3rd-2nd centuries B.C. A colossal female statue discovered by Cunningham at Besnagar and identified by him as an image of a Yakṣī is taken by Banerjea to be an idol of Śrī-Lakṣmī ; but there is nothing to prove its allegedly unmistakable Pañcarātra character. The finding of the statue along with the Kalpa-druma capital, depicting bags and vases overflowing with coins, which in the opinion of Banerjea himself must have been

1. Ibid., 106.29,

2. H. D. Bhattacharya, *The Classical Age*, p. 447.

3. *Jayā Sam.*, I. 43 ; 44.

4. RV., edited by Max Müller, II ed., Vol. IV, pp. 523-8.

5. RV, published by the *Vaidik Saṃśodhana Maṇḍala*, refer to p. 927f.

6. *Baudh. Gṛ. Śsū.*, III.5.

7. *Viṣṇudh.*, II. 128. 3f.

8. *Agni. Pu.*, 237. 2f.

9. Hence the opinion of Motichandra that Lakṣmī was known to be the wife of Viṣṇu even before the composition of the Pāli Buddhist texts (JUPHS, XXI, 1948, p. 22f) on the basis of these spurious verses, is to be rejected altogether.

10. Banerjea, DHI, I ed, p. 370; II ed., p. 374 f.n.; JISOA, 1941, pp. 141-46.



placed on a column standing before the shrine of Kubera Vaiśravaṇa, merely proves, if anything, that Śrī was associated with Kubera in the 3rd-2nd centuries B. C., the date of these sculptures. Definite evidence of Śrī's association with Viṣṇu is found in a verse<sup>1</sup> in the *Gāthāsaptasatī* of Hāla, containing a salutation to the god who wears the jewel Kaustubha on his breast; the reflexion of Lakṣmī's face falling on the jewel is likened to the shadow of a spotless moon cast over the sun during an eclipse. If the verse genuinely belongs to the anthology compiled by the king Hāla Sātavāhana, it would seem that Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī were united in the popular mythology as early as the first century A.D. ; but the opinion of scholars is divided over the date of the compilation<sup>2</sup>; the anthology contains many interpolated verses, and it is rightly pointed<sup>3</sup> out that its verses should not be used for chronological discussions. The absorption of Śrī into Vaiṣṇavism does not seem to have been accomplished much before the Gupta period, for even in the late second and the third centuries A.D., Śrī-Lakṣmī is featured on the reverse with the deity Kārttikeya on the obverse on the coins of the Yaudheya republic. She appears for the first time on the Gupta coins in association with Vaiṣṇavite symbols. We may also note that the lotus, which is closely connected with Śrī and is primarily her emblem, is the last to be added among the weapons of Viṣṇu<sup>4</sup>; its inclusion perhaps indicates the absorption of Śrī in his cult. Out of the fourteen Viṣṇu images in the Mathura art, catalogued by V.S. Agrawala, only one of the late Kuṣāṇa period holds a lotus in 'one of its hands<sup>5</sup>. This happens to be the earliest idol of Viṣṇu holding a lotus. The Gupta seals further illustrate the Vaiṣṇavite character of the goddess. On a seal discovered at Bhīṭā Lakṣmī figures with elephants standing on lotuses, and her left hand, according to Marshall, rests on Garuḍa<sup>6</sup>; but J.N. Banerjea thinks it to be a *caurī*<sup>7</sup>. However, on the Bhīṭā seal No. 42 Lakṣmī is clearly represented holding a conch in the right and the bird in her left hand. The goddess stands on a full-blown lotus, and two elephants pour

1. *Gāthāsaptasatī*, 151.

2. *Supra*, pp. 25-6.

3. Mirashi, *IHQ*, XXIII, 1947, p. 308-9 ; *IHQ*, XXI, pp. 194-5.

4. Agrawala, *op. cit* , p. vii ; No. 1168.

5. *Ibid*, p. 4f.

6. *ASIAR*, 1911-12, p. 52; No. 32.

7. Banerjea, *DHI*, I ed., p. 212.



water on both the sides over the conch and the bird. Śrī-Lakṣmī was firmly ensconced as Viṣṇu's consort during this period, and she was referred to as such even in the documents of rival sects. Thus the Gwalior stone inscription of Mihirakula<sup>1</sup>, which records the constructions of a sun-temple, closes with an imprecatory verse that the temple may exist as long as Śrī adorns the bosom of Viṣṇu.

Perhaps, the growing importance of the Viṣṇu-cult in the Gupta period was responsible to some extent for the coupling of the popular goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu.<sup>2</sup> Raychaudhuri is of the view that the enthronement of Lakṣmī by the side of Nārāyaṇa is paralleled by the eminent place occupied by the royal queens in this age ; it indicates "the assertion of the rights of women".<sup>3</sup> However, there is no evidence to show that the royal consorts enjoyed any political rights; in our opinion, the worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī by the side of Nārāyaṇa represented the ideal of conjugal life set forth in the Purāṇas and stressed in the Gupta period. It conceived of the female partner as the subordinate helpmate, who enjoyed social privileges by virtue of her marriage, but had no independent status. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>4</sup> contains instructions for the installation of the independent images of Lakṣmī ; these should be four-handed and accompanied by subordinate goddesses. Her two handed images are to be established by the side of Nārāyaṇa. The fact marked the subjection of the cult of the goddess to that of Viṣṇu rather than any vindication of "the rights of women"<sup>5</sup>. On a metaphysical plane, it embodied<sup>6</sup> the conception of the *puruṣa* (the male god) and the *prakṛti* (nature) in the sāṅkhya philosophy, where *prakṛti*, viewed as a female, is made

1. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 402; for the evidence of sectarian rivalry between the cults of Viṣṇu and the Sun refer to the Gangadhar inscription, which speaks of the Sun as running with bent head and folded hands at the sight of a dazzling temple of Viṣṇu. CII, III, No. 17, lines, 33-5.
2. D.A. Pai, *Monograph on the Religious Sects in India among the Hindus* p. 7.
3. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 177.
4. *Viṣṇudh.*, III, 82.
5. Gonda speaks of a legend popular in Bālī and other islands of the Indian Archipelago that Śrī died when forced to submit to Viṣṇu's love; several plants grew up over her dead body (AEV; p. 220). It would be tempting to infer that the legend refers to the subordination and the consequent dwindling into insignificance of Śrī by her absorption into Vaiṣṇavism; but Gonda's version seems to be a mistaken representation of the story mentioned by S. Levi (op. cit., p. XXVIII), who states that the goddess is supposed to have died when compelled by a demon to surrender to his love in Viṣṇu's garden.
6. *Viṣṇudh.*, 1, 41. 10f.



to play a very important yet subordinate role in the creation of the universe.

The Gupta inscriptions are the first epigraphic records which mention Śrī-Lakṣmī's union with Viṣṇu. The Jūnāgarh rock inscription of the time of Skanda-gupta refers to Viṣṇu as one who is the permanent abode of Lakṣmī, the goddess who dwells in a lotus<sup>1</sup>. The Gwalior stone inscription of the time of Mihirakula speaks of Viṣṇu as one who bears the goddess Śrī on his breast<sup>2</sup>. Another inscription<sup>3</sup> of the last quarter of the fifth or the first quarter of the sixth century A.D. describes Nārāyaṇa as the god 'whose breast is embraced by one who has her dwelling in a lotus', i.e. Lakṣmī. A Kadamba record of 500 A.D. begins with an adoration of 'the bhagavat who has Śrī on his breast'<sup>4</sup>, and a little later the Sārnāth inscription of Prakaṭāditya<sup>5</sup> and the Aphasad inscription of Ādityasena speak of Śrī as the wife of Vāsudeva<sup>6</sup>.

The literary works of the Gupta period further delineate the goddess as the consort of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. Kālidāsa frequently refers to her<sup>7</sup> and in a passage of the *Raghuvamśa* describes her as sitting on a lotus caressing the feet of the lord Viṣṇu<sup>8</sup>. The *Rāvaṇavaha* attributed to the Vākāṭaka king Pravarasena II speaks of Śrī as the *pralaya-grhiṇī*, the house-wife at the end of the world, of Rāma who was Viṣṇu incarnate<sup>9</sup>.

Sometimes the wives of the human incarnations of Viṣṇu are also described as the incarnations of Śrī. This is a natural sequence of their husbands' exaltation as Viṣṇu. A passage of the *Ādi Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* which speaks of Vāsudeva as an incarnate portion of Nārāyaṇa states that a portion of Śrī incarnated as his wife, Rukmiṇī<sup>10</sup>. According to the *Harivaṃśa*, Rukmiṇī was no

1. Fleet, CII, III, No. 14, line 1.

2. Ibid., No. 37, line 8.

3. The Andhavaram Plates of the Māṭhara King Anantaśakti-varman, EI, XXVIII, No. 31.

4. Sircar in *The Classical Age* p. 419.

5. CII, III, 79, line 4.

6. Ibid., No. 42, lines 11-12.

7. For references see B.S. Upadhyaya, *India In Kālidāsa*, pp. 241 ; 317.

8. *Raghuvamśa*, X. 8.

9. *Rāvaṇavaha*, II. 38.

10. *Mbh.*, I. 61. 90 ; 95.



ordinary woman, but the goddess Śrī incarnate, who had taken birth at the instance of Brahmā to fulfil some special object.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Sītā too is identified with Lakṣmī in the *Harivaṃśa*<sup>2</sup> and the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*<sup>3</sup>. But Kālidāsa simply compares the two and does not identify them<sup>4</sup>; and Pravarasena in the *Rāvaṇavaha* clearly distinguishes between the two by saying that Rāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, is so overwhelmed with grief at the loss of Sītā that he does not even think of Lakṣmī, his lone partner at the time of universal destruction.<sup>5</sup> It seems that Sītā's identification with Lakṣmī was accomplished one or two centuries later, although there are indications that originally Sītā also was a goddess in her own right.<sup>6</sup> But the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki does not conceive of her as a goddess; and the Purāṇic passages referred to may be later additions. The verse identifying Sītā with Lakṣmī in the *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>7</sup> is now considered spurious<sup>8</sup>, and although the play *Abhiṣeka* refers to Sītā as an incarnation of Lakṣmī, its authorship by Bhāsa is doubted<sup>9</sup>.

Like the syncretistic cult of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, the cult of Śrī-Lakṣmī also seems to have acquired the features of many tribal and local mother goddesses and assimilated their worship. An inscription<sup>10</sup> of A.D. 529 mentions a goddess Piṣṭapurī for whom king Saṃkṣobha granted a village at the request of a certain Choḍugomin, apparently a non-Āryan priest of the goddess. Another inscription<sup>11</sup> of 534 A.D. speaks of the same deity under the name Piṣṭapurikādevī whose temple was built by one Pulindabhāṭa at Mānapura, modern Manpur in the Madhya Pradesh. King Śarvanātha sanctioned the grant of a village by Pulindabhāṭa for her temple. Fleet suggests that the goddess should be identified with Lakṣmī<sup>12</sup>. Gonda supports this view<sup>13</sup> and thinks that the name is derived from *Piṣṭapūra*, a kind of

1. *Hariv.*, II. 51. 31.

2. *Ibid.*, I. 41. 129.

3. *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 239. 41.

4. *Raghuvamśa*, XI. 26.

5. *Rāvaṇavaha*, II. 38.

6. *Infra*.

7. *Rāmā.*, VI. 117. 27.

8. Bulcke, *Rāmakathā*, p. 271.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

10. Fleet, CII, III, No. 25.

11. *Ibid.*, No. 30.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-4; 130.

13. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 218.



sweetmeat. On the other hand, it is suggested that Piṣṭapūrī was originally the mother-goddess of Piṣṭapura, modern Pīthāpur in Madras ; her cult was perhaps brought to the north by some immigrants from the south. Whatever may be the case, the goddess Piṣṭapurikā could easily have been associated with Durgā, who is known as Annapūrṇā (the goddess possessed of food), as also with the fertility goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī. The worship of both the divinities, Śrī and Durgā, appears to have been popular in Central India, and it is possible that the two absorbed in their fold the worship of several local mother goddesses. The Madhya Pradesh was a strong seat of goddess worship, and apart from the evidence of the two inscriptions discussed above the Gangadhar inscription<sup>1</sup> of 423 A.D. records the building of a temple of the Divine Mothers at some place in Central India. The earliest sculptural representations of Śrī have been discovered in the monuments of this area. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>2</sup> states that Viṣṇu is known as Śrīpati in the Narmadā region, thus emphasising the popularity of Śrī in this locality. However, Durgā also appears to have been identified with some goddess of the Vindhya mountains, and she is often described as Vindhya-vāsini<sup>3</sup>, one living in the Vindhyas. It appears that Durgā and Lakṣmī were once very closely related with each other, and although our evidence is very late in date, it seems probable that originally they represented two aspects of the same pre-Āryan fertility deity, whose cult received numerous Āryan and non-Āryan accretions in later times. The two goddesses are only rarely identified, and that too mostly in late Purāṇic passages<sup>4</sup>; but their close affinity is suggested by the evidence of the Gupta coins on which Lakṣmī is depicted seated on a lion. Traditionally the lion is a *vāhana* (the bearer animal) of Durgā, and according to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>5</sup> the shrine of Durgā is to be marked with the lion emblem ; but on the coins of Candragupta and Kumāra-devī Lakṣmī appears seated on a lion holding a cornucopiae and her feet rest on a lotus.<sup>6</sup> On the King-Queen type coins

1. Fleet, CII, III, No. 17, lines 36-7.

2. *Viṣṇudh.*, III, 125.

3. *Mārka. Pu.*, *Devi-Māhātmya* section I. 70f.

4. *Viṣṇudh.*, III, 8.4. recounts Devī and Vibhāvarī among the names of Lakṣmī. Both of these are generally applied to Durgā.

5. *Viṣṇudh.*, III, 94. 38.

6. Altekar, *Gupta Kālīna mudrāyena*, p. 23, pl. I. 11.



of Kumāra-gupta I, she appears in the same fashion ; only the cornucopiae is replaced by a lotus<sup>1</sup>. The identity of the goddess and her affinity with Durgā is further corroborated by the evidence of a Khajurāho image<sup>2</sup>, which shows Lakṣmī sitting in the conventional way between two elephants who hold jars in their upturned trunks. The goddess is four-handed, two of which hold lotus stalks, and a couchant lion is depicted below her seat. However, generally Durgā and Lakṣmī are mentioned in contrast to each other. The *Manu-smṛti*<sup>3</sup> apparently emphasises the distinction when it advises that a householder should make an offering to Śrī near the head and to Bhadrakālī, evidently the same as Devī-Durgā, near the foot of his bed. The gulf was further widened when Śrī-Lakṣmī was adopted into Vaiṣṇavism and Durgā into the cult of Rudra-Śiva.

The conception of Śrī-Lakṣmī as the power of Viṣṇu was the philosophical sequence of the fusion of the Vaiṣṇavite and the Śākta elements. The late Kuṣāṇa period and the early centuries of the Gupta era saw the introduction and blending of the Śākta and tantric elements with the newly established cults of the Purāṇic gods. The development was perhaps as much the result of the popularisation of these cults and the absorption of indigeneous tantric elements as of foreign influence<sup>4</sup>. The earliest representations of the Seven Mothers with their distinctive characteristics connecting them with the seven gods are dated in the Kuṣāṇa period<sup>5</sup>. It appears that it was during this period that these goddesses, one of whom was described as Vaiṣṇavī, were conceived as the personifications of the energies of the respective gods. But it is only towards the end of the fifth century A.D. or later that the Vaiṣṇavite texts mention Śrī-Lakṣmī as the *śakti* (energy, power) of Viṣṇu through whom he carries on the work of creation and destruction of the universe. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* speaks of her as existing among all beings<sup>6</sup>; she represents all that is female and Viṣṇu all that is male, both are ever-existent and complementary to each other<sup>7</sup>. But Hazra thinks the entire passage to be a late

1. Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p. cxiii.

2. R.K. Dikshit, *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, Aligarh, 1960, p. 83.

3. *Msm.*, III, 89.

4. For foreign influence see Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

5. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, p. 59f. Varāhamihira states that the images of the divine mothers should be made "with the characteristics corresponding to those of the gods whose name they bear". *Br. Sam.* 50. 56.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, 1, 9. 134.

7. *Ibid.*, 1, 8. 17f.



interpolation,<sup>1</sup> and he points out<sup>2</sup> that the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā*, although full of tantric rites, does not refer to the *śakti* theory. It mentions several Vaiṣṇavite goddesses, Jayā, Kīrtti and Māyā etc., but they do not have any cosmological functions. However, *Viṣṇudharmottara* speaks of Lakṣmī as *vaiṣṇavīśakti*<sup>3</sup> and equates Viṣṇu and Śrī with Puruṣa and Prakṛti.<sup>4</sup> Śrī-Lakṣmī is described as Gāndhārī, the power of illusion pertaining to Viṣṇu.<sup>5</sup> The doctrine is fully expounded in the *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā*, a work of the sixth century A.D., which identifies Lakṣmī<sup>6</sup> with the energy of Viṣṇu through which the divine will carries on its cosmological activities.<sup>7</sup>

To sum up, Śrī-Lakṣmī was a pre-Āryan fertility deity, who in course of time absorbed many concepts associated with Āryan and non-Āryan goddesses. Originally an independent mother-goddess, she underwent several vicissitudes and came to be allied with Viṣṇu in the Gupta period; and with the rise of Tantricism in the late Kuṣāṇa or early Gupta period she was conceived as Viṣṇu's *śakti*, in which capacity she played a formidable role in the post-Gupta theological speculations of the Pañcarātra Vaiṣṇavas.

1. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 21f.

2. Ibid., p. 65.

3. *Viṣṇudh.*, I, 41. 14.

4. Ibid., v. 10.

5. Ibid. v. 25; III. 60. 3-4

6. *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā*, III. 93.

7. Ibid., v. 28f.



## DOCTRINES OF THE VAISNAVAS

### *The Doctrine of bhakti*

The new form of Viṣṇu-worship that evolved through a process of syncretism with popular cults was founded on the doctrine of *bhakti* or 'loving devotion', which distinguished it from its Vedic phase. The Vedic cult of Viṣṇu involved meticulous performance of sacrifices, and in the later Vedic texts, the god was very often connected<sup>1</sup> and identified with the institution of sacrifice. But the new religion, although, unlike the Buddhists and other heterodox sects, it did not condemn the sacrifice, made its performance quite unnecessary, for it was preached that one could obtain final liberation only through devotion to and faith in the deity, and not just by performing sacrifices. The shift from the ritualistic cultus to devotionism was a major change, which marked the birth of a new religion.

An idea as to how the doctrine of *bhakti* evolved and became a vital force in the cult of Viṣṇu may be best gained by following the history of the word, which has imbibed various shades of meanings through long vicissitudes and consequently defied an exact translation. For, it no longer denotes one particular idea but a whole set of ideas and a religious principle. We have shown<sup>2</sup> earlier that the terms *bhagavat*, *bhakti*, and *bhakta* are intrinsically related with one another, and that the *bhagavat* originally denoted primitive tribal group which owned all tribal wealth, *bhakti* meant a share thereof, and *bhakta* an individual who had received such a share. In course of time the *bhagavat* came to be regarded as a god, and *bhakta*, who was a member of the tribe, came to be looked upon as belonging to him

1. Gonda, AEV, p. 77f ; Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 13f ; 18.

2. Supra, p. 37f.



and as his devotee. In a Ṛgvedic hymn<sup>1</sup> the god Agni is described as distributing favours, discriminating between the *bhakta* and *abhakta*, that is one who belongs to him and one who does not. This explains why the word *bhakti* in the oft-quoted sūtra of Pāṇini<sup>2</sup> has a passive sense and denotes the thing one belongs to or resorts to, and not loving or belonging. The original conception of the *bhakti* was material and concrete, and the favours of the gods were conceived in terms of worldly objects ; hence in its early uses *bhakti* is sometimes convertible into *prasāda* (favour)<sup>3</sup>, and an idea of fondness, love, originating from the sense of kindredship between the *bhakti* and the *bhagavat*, came to be attached to the word, without implying any sense of inferiority to its possessor. Hopkins has shown<sup>4</sup> that in some early passages of the epics the term *bhakti* is freely applied to gods in the same manner as to men ; gods have *bha' ti* for men as men for gods. However, we may note that in the later passages of the epics and the Purāṇas only men possess *bhakti*, which signifies not only loving adoration of the deity but also serving the deity with a fondness which acknowledges the humbleness of the worshipper. The variations in the meanings of the word present a fitting reflex of the changes taking place in contemporary society, and indicate the extent to which social relations govern our religious thinking.

It is often remarked<sup>5</sup> that although the word *bhakti* in the sense of devotion does not occur in early Vedic literature, the sentiment is often expressed in Ṛgvedic hymns, especially those addressed to Varuṇa, which are full of impassioned devotion and intimate fondness very much akin to the spirit of *bhakti*. Often the gods are addressed as father, brother and friend, and the worshipper expresses his faith in their benevolence and grace. However, such expressions are usually the result of his belief in his consanguinity with the gods. The Vedic poet invokes Indra “Be our saviour, thou who art recognised as our relation, who looks upon us and pities us, as a friend, a father, most fatherly of fathers”.<sup>6</sup> Hopkins points out

1. ṚV, 1. 127.5.

2. Pā. IV. 3. 95.

3. Hopkins, JRAS, 1911, p. 736.

4. Ibid.

5. Grierson, JRAS, 1908, p. 839 ; Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 40 ; Macnicol, *Indian Theism*, p. 10 ; Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 18 ; S.K. De, BSOS, VI, p.668 ; Mrinal Dasgupta, IHQ, VI, p 319 ; 326.

6. RV, IV, 17.17, quoted by Hopkins, *The Ethics of India*, p.11



that such close and endearing terms are applied most frequently to the god Agni, and his relationship with the devotees is often stressed. Several Vedic clans such as Aṅgiras, Viśvāmitra and Bhāradvāja bear the names which were originally epithets of Agni, and they trace their descent from the god<sup>1</sup>. We may further refer to Hopkins, who agrees with Bergaigne that such phrases as “born of the same womb” and “having a common navel” used in R̥gvedic hymns are not mere poetic utterances, but indicate the belief in a real kinship between men and gods even with such a great god as Varuṇa<sup>2</sup>. This feeling of love and intimacy with the gods reflects a primitive communal life and disappears in the later Vedic age, when the Vedic worship is reduced to mere ceremonialism, and becomes a tool in the hands of the priests who now claim to compel the gods to grant desired objects by means of ritual sacrifice. At this stage, the relations between the deity and the devotee become formal and mechanical, and there is no place for loving adoration in such an attitude. The beginnings of the idea of divine grace and a personal god, which are linked with the principle of devotion, may be found<sup>3</sup> in some Upaniṣadic passages, although it is in the *Bhagavadgītā*, a *Bhāgavata* document, that the doctrine finds its first clear exposition.

In the *Bhagavadgītā* *bhakti* is pure affection for the highest being, who, although he has the whole world within him and is inconceivable, has also a physical adorable form, with whom the devotee may experience a feeling of close intimacy comparable to that between friend and friend, father and son, lover and beloved;<sup>4</sup> but there is no tinge of emotional love. In his fond adoration of the god, the devotee is fully conscious of the god's transcendence and majesty, and craves for his indulgence in all humility. The *Gītā* breathes in an atmosphere of awe and respect for the deity, who has a terrific form but condescends to assume a more bearable one for the benefit of his worshipper. It is aptly remarked that the divine grace in the *Gītā* is “the condescension of a mighty potentate, stern and

1. RV, IV, 17-17 quoted by Hop-Kino, *the Ethics of India* p.10-1.

2. Ibid., p.12.

3. *Kaṭha Upāniṣad*, II. 23 ; *Chāndogya Upāniṣad*, III. 4; see Bhandarkar op. cit., p.40 ; D.L.De, *IHQ*, 1933, p.660 ; Mrinal Dasgupta, *IHQ*, VI, p.502. The word *Bhakti* in the sense of religious devotion occurs for the first time in the *Śvetāśvatara Upāniṣad* (VI.43), and in some Buddhist works. *JBBRS*, XXIII, 1908-13 ; p.111 ; Jadunath Sinha, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, II, p. 48 ; Grierson, *ERE*, II, p. 539.

4. *Bhg.*, XI. 44.



functional” and that his glory is “the glory of an emperor” which an ordinary human being can hardly think of.<sup>1</sup> In the early stages of Vaiṣṇavism, a sense of the devotee’s lowliness is an essential ingredient of the concept of *bhakti*<sup>2</sup>, and seems to reflect the ideology of the ruling classes. The ruling classes of the Gupta period express their *bhakti* to the god in an attitude of service, described as *dāsyabhāva* (the state of servitude) by later theologians, and generally the relationship of the master and the slave is established between the deity and the devotee.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the *Gītā*, *bhakti* is not simply adoration of the god in utter humility ; it is also intellectual conviction and faith.<sup>4</sup> Faith is the basis of religious devotion, so *bhakti* is devotion which arises out of faith. Hence the godhead declares in the *Gītā* that no matter what one believes in, as long as one has faith, he grants him firm devotion and fulfils his desires through the same faith.<sup>5</sup>

The emphasis on devotion and faith in the *Gītā* was quite in keeping with the demands of the times. By the end of the Mauryan age, Āryan society was firmly established into a social structure based on the varṇa divisions. The old feeling of uneasiness and apprehension at the break-up of tribal solidarity had given place to a sense of security and hope as the new order settled down, and stable governments were formed, based not on tribal loyalties but on varṇa organisation. To hold this form of society together, devotion and loyalty were essential attributes, which could take the place of earlier tribal bonds and ensure the smooth functioning of the state. It was not necessary to question the suitability of the object of devotion, for the rulers may not be above human weaknesses ; but on the other hand they could offer protection and stability and so command the loyalty of their subjects. In such conditions, a religion based on devotion and faith, which also had a Messianic aspect, could have

1. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 330.

2. Cf. *bhaktyavānati-mātra grāhya-mṛdu-hṛdayasyaḥ*, one whose soft heart may be won over simply by lowering oneself in *bhakti* or devotion to him, the Allahabad pillar ins. of Samudra-gupta, line 25, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 259.

3. In the Susunia rock ins. (EI, XIII, No. 9.) king Candravarman describes himself as the chief of the servants of the god Viṣṇu. Names indicating an attitude of service are frequent among the members of the ruling classes ; cf. Varāhadāsa (Mandasor ins. of Yaśodharman line 11, Sircar, op. cit. p. 389) ; Vṣṇudāsa (Udayagiri cave ins. line 2, ibid., p. 271) ; Cakradāsa (Pooṛa ins. of Prabhāvatī-guptā line 22, ibid., p. 410).

4. *Bhg.*, IX. 13 ; 23, 26, ; Hopkins, *The Ethics of India*, p. 194.

5. *Bhg.*, VII. 21-2.



maximum appeal for the people, and in the early centuries preceding and succeeding the Christian era religious thinking in practically all the sects was deeply coloured by hopeful devotional ideas. The pessimistic atheism of Buddhism which was the product of a period of great social upheaval, when the tribal society was breaking into pieces,<sup>1</sup> took an optimistic turn in the *Mahāyāna* Buddhism which preached devotion to a compassionate saviour. But the idea found its best expression in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which preached devotion to a god who incarnated himself repeatedly for the good of his devotees and maintained the social and religious laws.

None-the-less, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, the doctrine of *bhakti*, in its wider sense, becomes a religious principle and a way of life. In practical application, this doctrine does not mean mere enjoyment of ecstatic trances fancying the nearness of the deity ; it means the carrying out of one's caste duties and other social actions in a spirit of renunciation.<sup>2</sup> At one place<sup>3</sup> in the *Mahābhārata* Dhṛtarāṣṭra questions Sañjaya about the contents of *bhakti* for Janārdana (Kṛṣṇa), and receives the reply that one should not indulge in worldly illusions (*māyā*) and should not practice false *dharma*, but by studying scriptures with a pure mind and practising devotion one should know Janārdana. In the *Gītā*, this kind of devotion is meant for the learned and the wise who are capable of pursuing the path of knowledge, but the emphasis is on simple devotional faith, which does not have the emotional intensity to flaunt the rules of society, but encourages the performance of one's social obligations in quiet submission resigning oneself to the mercy of the god, who ordained the rules of varṇa,<sup>4</sup> and worshipping him with leaf, flower, fruit or water whatever one could afford<sup>5</sup>. The theory of desireless action, if, at all, it made any impression on the early Bhāgavata worshippers, may have been applied to the social actions only ; in religious matters the records of the period often show that the Bhāgavata votaries undertook the performance of sacred works with a view to earning religious merit. The Traikūṭaka Mahārājas describe themselves as 'the hired labourers of the bhagavat'.<sup>6</sup> Apparently the analogy of the wage-earning

1. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, pp. 246-7

2. Cf., *Bhg.*, XVIII. 56.

3. *Mbh.*, V. 67.5

4. *Bhg.*, IV. 13.

5. *Ibid.*, IX. 26.

6. *Infra*.



servant indicates their wish to earn religious merit by serving the deity. Later sectarian works do not commend any such desire on the part of the devotee. The true devotee is likened to a slave for whom the master, the god, bears the full responsibility, and the paid worker, the doer of interested works, is considered much inferior to the former kind of worshipper.<sup>1</sup>

The tendency towards erotic mysticism in the Bhāgavata concept of *bhakti* is hardly perceptible in the records of the period under study; but the identification of Nārāyaṇa with the shepherd-god Kṛṣṇa eventually led to the introduction of this element. The early life of Kṛṣṇa, as described in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, is sensuous and human in character, and it seems very likely that the popular adoration of this god was emotional tending towards eroticism. However, emotional *bhakti* charged with a feeling of intense love for a god who fulfilled the yearnings of his devotees and reciprocated their love, finds expression, at a later stage, in the hymns of the Tamil Alvar saints and still later in Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, when Vaiṣṇavism had reached nearer to the masses and assumed a popular character.

Thus the concept of *bhakti* evolved and adopted itself to the changes in the social conditions of the times, which explains its continued appeal.

### *The Doctrine of Ahimsā*

Devotional Vaiṣṇavism laid special stress on *ahimsā*, or non injury. The *Bhagavadgītā* mentions it thrice<sup>2</sup> as an attribute of knowledge, and a virtue of those who are born to divine estate.<sup>3</sup> But since the main theme of the work is devotion to god, it does not pay much attention to the principle of *ahimsā*. Perhaps the setting of the poem militated against it, for it is supposed to be an exhortation to a sanguine war, and the preaching of non-violence would have been most inopportune. Greater emphasis on this doctrine is found in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata*, which states<sup>4</sup> that in the horse-sacrifice performed by king Vasu Uparicara, the devout worshipper of Viṣṇu, no animals were killed, and only the

1. *Bhakti-Kalpadruma*, JRAS, 1908. p. 347; Grierson, ERE, II. p. 544b.

2. *Bhg.*, XIII. 7; XVI. 2; XVII. 14.

3. For this interpretation see Hill's translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, p. 243. f.n. 5.

4. *Mbh.*, XII. 323. 10.



products of wilderness were offered to the deity. Nārāyaṇa is said to have taken birth in four forms as sons of Dharma (righteousness). The Purāṇas significantly add that the four forms of Nārāyaṇa had Ahimsā as their mother.<sup>1</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* states that a devotee of Viṣṇu does not commit violence of any kind, he neither kills nor forcibly takes away something which does not belong to him<sup>2</sup>, and the god cannot reside in the heart of one who indulges in such acts.<sup>3</sup> It is said that Keśava is pleased only with those who do not inflict pain or commit slaughter of any living being<sup>4</sup>, and similar ideas are expressed in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*.<sup>5</sup>

The question, whether Bhāgavatism borrowed the doctrine of *ahimsā* from Buddhism and Jainism or these sects took up the idea from Bhāgavatism<sup>6</sup>, loses much of its sense if we keep in mind the evolving character of Bhāgavatism. We have seen that Bhāgavatism or the cult of Nārāyaṇa at its inception was connected with human sacrifice ; it appears that in course of time animals were substituted in place of human beings. A passage<sup>7</sup> of the *Anugītā* section of the *Mahābhārata* states that formerly animals were offered to god Nārāyaṇa. However, at the time of the composition of this text such offerings had already become a thing of past. The *Śānti Parva* states<sup>8</sup> that the custom of offering meat, honey, wine, fish etc. to the deity is non-Vedic, and Viṣṇu should be worshipped with rice boiled in milk and flowers. Apparently honey was forbidden since it involved hurting the bees ; but in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma worshipped Viṣṇu and Rudra with the cooked flesh of a deer.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this is a reference to the Vedic worship of Viṣṇu. At any rate, neither the worship of Nārāyaṇa nor of Viṣṇu was originally based on the principles of *ahimsā*. The cult of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa also did not abstain from bloody offerings, and in the *Harivaṃśa* Kṛṣṇa

1. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 46.

2. *Vi. Pu.*, III. 7. 20.

3. *Ibid.*, v. 28.

4. *Ibid.*, III.8. 14-5.

5. *Viṣṇudh.*, 1. 58. 1f.

6. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 124; also see S.K. De, *Our Heritage*, Vol. I, 1953, p. 22. f.n. 1.

7. *Mbh.*, XIV. 25.16; SBE, VIII, p. 280.

8. *Mbh.*, XII. 257. 9-10.

9. *Rāmā.*, II. 56. 22-3.



advised the milkmen to sacrifice animals in honour of the mountain-deity.<sup>1</sup> It is stated that the cowherds exultingly undertook the sacrifice and feasted on the meat of buffaloes and other animals.<sup>2</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also states<sup>3</sup> that the meat offerings were made to the mountain-god, who was just another form of the god Kṛṣṇa. Evidently animal-sacrifices were stopped when the killing of animals became unpopular. The *Rāmāyaṇa* states that whatever food a worshipper eats the same is offered to his god<sup>4</sup>. The offerings of flowers etc. seem to have come in vogue when vegetarianism was gaining ground. A legend mentioned<sup>5</sup> in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata*, speaks of a controversy between the gods and the ṛṣis over the propriety of slaughtering animals for sacrifice. The gods held that a goat should be sacrificed ; but the sages argued that offerings should consist of vegetable grains only. The matter was referred to the Pañcarātra king Vasu Uparicara, who out of partiality to the gods ruled in their favour. He was cursed by the ṛṣis, and had to live in a hole in the earth till Nārāyaṇa, pleased with his intense devotion, rescued him by sending his Garuḍa. The story, which is repeated in the Purāṇas<sup>6</sup>, indicates that the earlier worship which involved the slaying of animals was abandoned and denounced by later thinkers. Whether the doctrine evolved independently within Bhāgavatism or was taken over from Buddhism cannot be determined at present ; the same forces, as gave rise to Buddhism and other heterodox sects based on non-violence might have led to the adoption of *ahiṃsā* in Bhāgavatism also.

Analysing the material basis of the religious movements of the sixth century B.C. based on *ahiṃsā*, it is stated<sup>7</sup> that in the varṇa-divided society cattle-herding was primarily done by the third varṇa, which was engaged in agricultural pursuits. With the change-over from pastoral to agricultural economy, the number of cattle reared now was much less, and these were owned by individual families or clans of the vaiśya class. But the ritual of Vedic sacrifice, evolved

1. *Hariv.*, II. 16.11.

2. *Ibid.*, II. 17.15.

3. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 10. 44.

4. *Yadannah puruṣo bhavati tadannāstasya devatāh*, *Rāmā.*, II. 103.30.

5. *Mbh.*, XII. 324.

6. Cf. *Vā., Pu.* 57. 86-125.

7. Kosambi, ISIH, pp. 157-8.



in a pastoral tribal society in which the cattle was collectively owned, did not take into account these novel factors with the result that the cattle were appropriated for sacrifices without paying any compensation to the owners, who suffered from the increasing number of sacrifices in the later Vedic age. It is further suggested that the rapid transformation of tribes into petty states and their constant warfare constituted a serious menace to trade and agriculture. Therefore, invariably all religious movements of the sixth century B.C. questioned the validity of Vedic sacrifices, and the most active among them, Buddhism and Jainism, positively advocated non-violence. In our opinion the factors, which caused the formulation of the *ahiṃsā* doctrine in the age of the Buddha, generally remained unchanged in the subsequent centuries, and hence the doctrine was adopted and stressed in neo-Vaiṣṇavism.

In actual practice, we may point out, the doctrine chiefly meant abstinence from animal-killing and vegetarianism. None of the religions, Jainism, Buddhism or Vaiṣṇavism, ever forbade or restrained a king from waging a war, and the Purāṇas often refer to the wars of world-conquest (*digvijaya*) of the Vaiṣṇavite kings. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, perhaps in an effort to mollify the older religious tradition, allows the committing of *hiṃsā* (injury) for sacrifice, for works done for the gods and the manes, and for *madhuparka* (an offering of honey) ; but<sup>1</sup> otherwise it states that even an insect or a fly should not be killed, and<sup>2</sup> that there is nothing so sinful as eating meat.<sup>3</sup> The principle of non-violence was, no doubt, an idealisation of the mundane desire to protect the cattle for agriculture and to stop their forcible seizure. We may note that in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Rāma proudly speaks of Ayodhyā as a place where the slaughter of animals fit for agriculture was forbidden.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Doctrine of Incarnation*

The theory of incarnation is a fundamental Vaiṣṇavite doctrine which seems to have evolved with the identification of *bhagavat* Nārāyaṇa with the hero-god Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, who thus came to be

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 252. 28-30.

2. *Ibid.*, vv. 2f.

3. *Ibid.*, v. 17.

4. *Rāmā.*, II. 100. 44.



looked upon as the human incarnation of the former.<sup>1</sup> The germs of this doctrine are sometimes traced<sup>2</sup> to a Ṛgvedic passage<sup>3</sup>, which refers to Viṣṇu's having assumed another form in battle, and it is pointed out<sup>4</sup> that the *Nirukta*<sup>5</sup> speaks of some deities who have both the anthropomorphic and the non-anthropomorphic forms. Gonda<sup>6</sup>, states that in the *Ṛgveda* Indra is especially the god who roams about in several forms. However, the Vaiṣṇavite theory of incarnation is not merely a belief in the assumption of various forms by a deity; the *Bhagavadgītā* which contains an early exposition of this tenet, clearly states<sup>7</sup> that the godhead incarnates himself with a purpose<sup>8</sup>, to destroy the wicked and protect the righteous. The god has taken numerous such births; and whenever the right (*dharma*)<sup>9</sup> declines and the wrong mounts, he creates himself. In this form the doctrine appears to have been considerably influenced by the Buddhist concept of the former Buddhas whose prime attribute is compassion. The Buddhist doctrine has a chronological priority; some of the former Buddhas are known<sup>10</sup> to have been worshipped as early as the third century B.C.

The *Bhagavadgītā* states that whatever is endowed with power, prosperity and strength is sprung from a part of the god's energy.<sup>11</sup> In this sense everything good and mighty was a partial manifestation of the god. Perhaps on the analogy of the Bodhisattvas the incarnations of Viṣṇu are said to be incalculable<sup>12</sup>, but the well-known term for incarnation, *avatāra*, derived from the root *avatr* literally 'to descend', 'come down', is not used in early works. The *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nārāyaṇīya* take recourse to such words as *janman*<sup>13</sup> (birth),

1. Jacobi, ERE, VII, p. 195.

2. R.P. Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races*, pp. 110-1.

3. RV, VII. 100.6.

4. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii, p. 712.

5. *Nirukta*, VII, 6-7.

6. Gonda, AEV, p. 124.

7. *Bhg.*, IV. 5-8.

8. On the purpose of an *avatāra*, see S.L. Katre, *The Allahabad University Studies*, X, p. 48f.

9. Śaṅkarācārya and Rāmānujācārya explain it as *varṇāśrama-dharma*, Hill, *The Bhagavadgītā*, tr., p. 138.

10. J.N. Banerjea, AIU, p. 391, V.M. Apte, *ibid.*, p. 450.

11. *Bhg.*, X. 49.

12. *Mbh.*, XII. 337. 35 ; *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 74. 43-4.

13. *Bhg.*, IV. 5.



*sambhava*<sup>1</sup> (springing up, coming into being), *srjana*<sup>2</sup> (creation), and *prādurbhāva*<sup>3</sup> (appearance) for expressing the idea of incarnation and the god is said to have 'assumed a form'<sup>4</sup> or 'entered into a human body'<sup>5</sup>. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, with the exception of an interpolated passage<sup>6</sup>, nowhere mentions the word *avatāra*, and the *Harivaṃśa* also describes the incarnations of Viṣṇu as his *prādurbhāvas*<sup>7</sup>. The term *avatāra* implies the intrinsic superiority of the principal deity Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu who does an act of condescension by incarnating himself in a particular form; but in the beginning the tendency was to incorporate different popular divinities such as the Boar, the Man-Lion and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa simply by recognising them as manifestations of the same god.

Of the important and specific incarnations of the god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* contains two lists, the first<sup>8</sup> enumerating six, and the second<sup>9</sup> only four incarnations of the deity. A verse<sup>10</sup> cataloguing the ten incarnations of the god is now proved to be a late interpolation. The second list giving the four incarnations of the god, the Varāha (Boar), Narasiṃhay (Man-Lion), Vāmana (Dwarf), and Mānuṣa (Human, *i.e.* Kṛṣṇa), seems to represent the original nucleus, and is also found in the *Āraṇyaka Parva*<sup>11</sup> of the *Mahābhārata*, and the *Markaṇdeya Purāṇa*<sup>12</sup> which, however, mentions Māthura, *i.e.*, Kṛṣṇa, in place of Mānuṣa. Gradually, the number was extended more and more in later works,

1. Bhg., V. 6; 8.
2. Ibid., V. 7.
3. Mbh., XII. 326. 61.
4. Cf. *nārasimham vapuḥ kṛtvā*, *ibid.*, v. 75; *varāham rupamāsthitaḥ*, *ibid.*, v. 72; the same expression is used in the *Āraṇyaka Parva*, 187. 11.
5. Ibid., III. 187. 28.
6. *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 146. 15.
7. *Hariv.*, I. 41. 11f.
8. Mbh., XII. 326. 72f.
9. Ibid.; 337. 36.
10. Mbh. (vul), XII. 339. 103-4.
11. Mbh., III. 100. 9 enumerates Varāha, Narasimha and Vāmana; Kṛṣṇa incarnation could not be mentioned as the passage refers to a past event. A passage of the *Āraṇyaka Parva* found in the vulgate (III. 272. 51f), listing these four incarnations, is not included in the critical edition.
12. *Mārka. Pu.*, 53. 56.



so that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*<sup>1</sup> and the *Pañcarātra Saṁhitās*<sup>2</sup> enumerate as many as twenty-four and twenty-nine incarnations of the deity.

The Boar incarnation seems to have incorporated a pre-Āryan cult of the sacred pig. The *Rgveda*<sup>3</sup> speaks of a Boar, hostile to the Āryans, and killed by Indra<sup>4</sup>, and the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* states<sup>5</sup> that a boar kept the wealth of the Asuras on the other side of the hills. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*<sup>6</sup> refers to a boar who raised the earth from the primeval waters, and identifies him with the creator-god Prajāpati. It is probable that the Boar was a totem of some powerful non-Āryan tribe undergoing brāhmaṇisation in the age represented by the Brāhmaṇas. Gonda has discussed<sup>7</sup> in detail the connection of the Boar with fertility, illustrated in the legends mentioning his amorous relations with the goddess Earth, and the birth of their son Naraka, an embodiment of dung and filth. We may add that the *Viṣṇudharmottara* prescribes<sup>8</sup> the worship of the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu as a preliminary to agricultural operations. Iconographical representations often depict the Boar as treading on the coils of the serpent Śeṣa. The close association of the two divinities is evidently due to their agricultural character. In Greece too, the boar was connected with fertility and with the fertility goddess Demeter.<sup>9</sup>

The region round the Vindhyas seems to have been a stronghold of the cult of the Boar. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* states that the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu should be worshipped in Gayāśīrṣa<sup>10</sup>, and that the Kandamāla hill was especially sacred to this form of the god.<sup>11</sup> The work further recommends the worship of the Varāha in the Śrāddha ceremony<sup>12</sup>, and we know that Gaya is considered especially

1. *Bhā. Pu.*, I. 3f.
2. *Sāttvata Saṁhitā*, Chap. IX, see Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 391f.
3. RV, I. 61. 7; VIII. 77. 10; see S.L. Katre, op. cit., pp. 72-5.
4. But compare the analysis of this myth by B. Kakati, 'The Boar in Mythology and Folklore', *D.V. Potdar Commemorative Volume*, p. 43.
5. *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, VI. 2. 4.
6. *Śat. Br.* XIV. 1 2; *Taittirīyā Saṁhitā*, VII. 15; *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, I. 1. 3. 5f; *Rāmā*, II. 110. 4.
7. Gonda, AEV, pp. 129-45.
8. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 119. 62.
9. Will Durant, *The Life of Greece*, p. 179.
10. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 121. 12.
11. *Ibid.*, III. 125. 10.
12. *Ibid.*, III. 119. 13.



sacred for making offerings to the manes. An inscription<sup>1</sup> of A.D. 500 records the erection of the Boar temple in the Saugor district of Madhya Pradesh.

An inscription of the time of Buddha-gupta speaks of the two gods Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin. Kokāmukhasvāmin was identified by some scholars as Śiva<sup>2</sup> or Narasiṃha<sup>3</sup>, but on the basis of a passage of the *Varāha Purāṇa* Raychaudhuri<sup>4</sup> has established clearly that both the gods refer to the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. T.A.G. Rao has noticed<sup>5</sup> three forms of this incarnation, Bhūvarāha or Ādivarāha, Yājñavarāha and Pralayavarāha, and, in our opinion, Śvetavarāhasvāmin and Kokāmukhasvāmin correspond to the two last-mentioned varieties. The inscription, as interpreted by Sircar, proves the existence of the temples dedicated to these gods in Barāhachatra (Nepal), and the building of two temples in their honour by a banker in the Dinajpur district of West Bengal.<sup>6</sup> The worship of the Boar was quite popular and well-developed in the Gupta period, and the *Raghuvamśa*<sup>7</sup> and the *Rāvaṇavaha*<sup>8</sup> refer to the Mahāvarāha and the Ādivarāha forms of the god.<sup>9</sup>

With the exception of a late passage of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* there is no reference to the god Narasiṃha in the Vedic literature. It is suggested that some elements of the story of Narasiṃha incarnation, who slew the demon Hiranyakaśipu, are derived from the legend of Indra and the demon Namuci.<sup>10</sup> According to R. Otto, Narasiṃha was originally an independent deity, conceived as an embodiment of the numinous 'potence'<sup>11</sup>. In our opinion, Narasiṃha was originally a dreadful god like the Vināyakas; to be propitiated

1. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 396-7.
2. R.D. Banerji; *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, pp. 114-5; Dikshitar, *The Gupta Polity*, p. 327.
3. Kamala Ray, *IHQ*, XVII, 1941, p. 378.
4. Raychaudhuri, 'Kokāmukhasvāmin', *B.C. Law Commemorative Volume*, I, p. 88f; his arguments are further strengthened by D.C. Sircar, *St. Geo. Anc. Med. Ind.*, pp. 221-2.
5. T.A.G. Rao, *EH*, Vol. 1, pt. i, p. 132f; J.N. Banerjea, *JISOA*, XIII, p. 123f.
6. *Infra*.
7. *Raghuvamśa*, VII. 56.
8. *Rāvaṇavaha*, IV. 22; VI. 2; IX. 5.
9. For the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, also see Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 210.
10. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II; ii, pp. 718-9.
11. R. Otto, *The Visva Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. I, pt. ii, p. 17; *The Original Gītā* p. 240-1.



for his wrath. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* prescribes his worship for removing all hindrances<sup>1</sup>, for pacifying the harmful effects of evil stars, planets and other supernatural agencies and for avoiding the danger of thieves, enemies and wild animals in the dark.<sup>2</sup> He is to be worshipped also at the time of coronation in the ceremony of Purandara—śānti.<sup>3</sup> The Narasiṃha-stotra and Narasiṃha-mantra are deemed to be efficacious for curing diseases and preventing calamities.<sup>4</sup> His worship appears to have been quite popular in the early centuries of the Christian era. The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* describes<sup>5</sup> him as having mighty claws and sharp teeth, and a magical formula, mentioned in the *Caraka Samhitā* as an antidote against the entry of evil spirits in a house, invokes Puruṣasiṃha, Viṣṇu, Viśvakarman, Kṛṣṇa, Bhava and Vibhava in the same breath.<sup>6</sup> Puruṣasiṃha, is evidently the same as Narasiṃha ; in the *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, Kālidasa speaks of Narasiṃha as Puruṣakesarin.<sup>7</sup>

The *Viṣṇudharmottara* places the Man-Lion incarnation of the god in the Madra country.<sup>8</sup> The Madrakas were a people living in Central Punjab with their capital at Sialkot.<sup>9</sup> To this day, the worship of Narasiṃha is very popular in Punjab, especially in the Kangra district, and men and women worship this god in the form of a sacred coconut on every Sunday.<sup>10</sup> The worshippers of Narasiṃha also wear on the arm an amulet containing the picture of the god in the form of a man, and it is considered highly sacred.<sup>11</sup> It is very probable that the god Narasiṃha was the centre of a popular cult flourishing in some parts of Punjab, and in the early centuries of the Christian era, his worship was absorbed into Vaiṣṇavism by recognising him as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

The Dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu appears to be a mythological elaboration of the three steps of Viṣṇu, mentioned in the *Rgveda*,

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 119. 13.
2. *Ibid.*, III. 123. 8-9.
3. *Ibid.*, II. 19. 7-8.
4. *Ibid.*, I. 196. 37f.
5. *Tai. Ār.*, X. 1. 6.
6. *Caraka Samhitā, Cikitsā-sthāna*, 23. 90-4.
7. *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, VII. 3.
8. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 121.4.
9. Raychaudhuri, PHAI, p. 545.
10. Sardaru Balhari, IA, XXIV, 1895, p. 176.
11. *Ibid.*



with the assimilation of some popular elements. Macdonell<sup>1</sup>, Keith<sup>2</sup> and several other scholars<sup>3</sup> have discussed it at length. A demon king Bali conquered the whole world and threatened the gods. When the king was performing a sacrifice, Viṣṇu assuming the form of a dwarf asked the gift of as much land as he could measure in three steps. Bali agreed, and Viṣṇu, transforming himself into a giant, covered the entire world in three strides and sent the demon to the nether world. The tale perhaps hints at the suppression of a cult of Bali, for Varāhamihira gives instruction for making a cult-image of king Bali<sup>4</sup>, and it seems that the demon-king also received some kind of worship. The Junāgaḍh inscription of Skanda-gupta begins with an invocation to the Dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu.<sup>5</sup>

The short list of the *Nārāyaṇīya* mentions only one human incarnation who was evidently none else but Vāsudeva. This fact strengthens our hypothesis that the primary factor in the development of the theory of incarnation in Vaiṣṇavism was the identification of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa with Nārāyaṇa. However, the longer list<sup>6</sup> given in the *Nārāyaṇīya* adds two more incarnations to the original four, Rāma Bhārgava and Rāma Dāśarathi. Haṃsa and Hayagriva are introduced a little later.

The apotheosis of Bhārgava Rāma, better known as Paraśurāma, was the work of the Bhṛgu brāhmaṇas, the redactors of the *Mahābhārata*, for, outside the Bhārgava circle he does not seem to have won much favour. His identification with Viṣṇu occurs only once in the *Mahābhārata*, in the list mentioned above ; otherwise he appears simply as a great legendary hero who annihilated the kṣattriyas no less than twenty-one times. His glorification, as Sukthankar has shown<sup>7</sup>, was not approved of by a section of the brāhmaṇas, who were the custodians of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, and this epic invariably presents the Bhārgavas, and more specifically Paraśurāma, in an unfavourable light. It tells<sup>8</sup> the tale of the defeat

1. Macdonell, JRAS, 1895, p. 15f.

2. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas*, pp. 110-1.

3. Gonda, AEV, p. 145f ; T.A.G.Rao, EHI, Vol. I, pt.i, p. 161f.

4. *Br. Sam.*, 50.30.

5. CII, III, No. 14.

6. *Supra*, p. 120-1.

7. Sukthankar, ABORI, XVIII, p. 69.

8. *Rāmā.*, I. 75f.



of Paraśurāma at the hands of kṣattriya Rāma, a greater incarnation of the same god. Kālidasa refers to it<sup>1</sup>, and it appears that the legends of the deification and humiliation of Paraśurāma were evolved between the second and the fourth century A.D. A Nāsik inscription of the second century A.D. mentions Rāmatīrtha<sup>2</sup>, the sacred abode of Rāma Bhārgava as known from the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>3</sup>

The popularity and ethical nature of the Rāma legends made Rāma of the Ikṣvāku lineage eminently suitable for the role of a Bodhisattva or of an incarnation of Viṣṇu ; and in the Pālī *Daśaratha Jātaka*<sup>4</sup> Rāma figures as a Bodhisattva. The *Anāmaka Jātaka*, which was translated into Chinese in A.D. 251 and shows acquaintance with the *Rāmāyaṇa* story of the abduction of Sītā and the 'help received from the monkey-king, still speaks of Rāma, the unnamed king, as a Bodhisattva. But, the *Daśaratha Kathānam*, which was translated into Chinese in A.D. 472 and is in remarkable agreement with the *Rāmāyaṇa* attributes to Rāma the valour and prowess of Nā-rā-yen (Skt. Nārāyaṇa).<sup>5</sup> Bulcke points out<sup>6</sup> that the *Daśaratha-Kathānam* incidentally refers to Kaniṣka, so the original Indian text could not have been written earlier than the second century A.D. ; and the Buddhist works of a subsequent period do not mention Rāma. Apparently by the end of the second century A.D. Rāmā's identity with Viṣṇu had gained wide prevalence, and hence the Buddhists ignored him. He appears as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the first and the last books of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which are generally regarded as later additions made presumably in the second century A.D. , but in the original epic he is depicted simply as an ideal hero. This has led to several brilliant pieces of euhemerism of which Pargiter's interpretation of the legend may be cited as a typical instance.<sup>7</sup> He thinks that the monkeys of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were a Dravidian tribe akin to the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā ; and he completely disregards the mythical character of these stories. A similar attempt was made as

1. *Raghuvamśa*, XI. 64f.

2. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 161, line 3 of the in.

3. *Mbh.*, III. 83. 40.

4. Fausboll, *Jātakas*, No. 461.

5. Raghuvīra and Chikyo Yomamoto, *The Rāmāyana in China*, p. 27.

6. C Bulcke, *Rāmakathā*, p. 55f.

7. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*. pp. 276-8 ; also Pusalker in *The Vedic Age*, pp. 290-1.



early as the third century A.D. by Vimalasūri, who jeered at the poets who thought that the mighty Rāvaṇa could have been slain with the help of the monkeys or that Kumbhakarna could sleep for six months at a stretch. According to Vimalasūri the Rākṣasas and Vānaras of the Rāma story were not monkeys and demons but Vidyādharas, having human forms and superhuman capabilities. His work is a too obvious subsequential rationalisation of the whole cycle of the Rāma legends coloured with a Jaina bias, as is indicated by his treatment of the episode relating to the birth of Hanūmān.

The earliest available version of the Rāma story is found in the *Daśaratha Jātaka*, which differs from the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki on some very important points. It speaks of Daśaratha as a king of Vārāṇasī and not Ayodhyā and mentions Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Sītā. But, it makes Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, children of the first wife of Daśaratha and Bharata their stepbrother. Daśaratha sends away Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa into exile in the Himālayan region to protect them from the evil machinations of their stepmother; and Sītā insists on going with her brothers. The exile lasts only 12 years and not 14 years as in Vālmīki's account. When the period of exile is over, Rāma marries his sister Sītā and makes her his chief queen. There is no mention of the abduction of Sītā and the expedition against Laṅkā. The entire episode appears to have been invented or derived from some other source by the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who added two years more to the period of exile and changed the locale of the exile from the Himavat to the Deccan. There is much force in Weber's suggestion<sup>1</sup> that Vālmīki hailed from some place in the neighbourhood of Ayodhyā, and so he changed the birth place of Rāma from Vārāṇasī to Ayodhyā. That in some versions of the Rāma legend Daśaratha was the king of Vārāṇasī is proved by the *Uttara Purāṇa* of Guṇabhadra, who seems to have followed a Jaina version of the Rāma legends, which agreed on some points with the *Daśaratha Jātaka* but differed in many respects from the one followed by Vimalasūri. However, as Guṇabhadra is familiar with the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki and is largely dependent on him, he tries to reconcile the traditional Jaina account before him with the account of Vālmīki and informs that originally the capital of Daśaratha was

1. Weber, IA, 1872 ; p. 123 ; 253.



Vārāṇasī, and later he migrated to Ayodhyā. But, the mention of Sītā as the sister of Rāma is found only in the *Dāśāratha Jātaka*, the Japanese and Malaya *Rāmāyaṇas* and the *Hikāyata Mahārāja Rāvaṇa*. In our opinion, this is the most primitive feature of the Rāma legends available to us.

The *Daśaratha Jātaka* adds 'devī' to the name of Sītā. Although the term is often used as a simple honorific or surname, perhaps, in this context, as in the case of Añjanā-devī in the *Ghaṭa Jātaka*, it is suggestive of her divine character. Sītā, literally [the furrow, is an important agricultural goddess in the Gṛhya Sūtras and is invoked in the Halābhiyoga ceremony.<sup>1</sup> The *Harivaṃśa* speaks of her as the goddess of the farmers.<sup>2</sup> It seems that, like the goddess Ekānamśā, in course of time, Sītā also was associated with two male gods who were initially regarded as her brothers. Later, one of these brothers became her husband, as is evidenced by the *Daśaratha Jātaka*. But the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in conformity with the ethical notions of his time, could not think of Rāma being the husband and brother of Sītā at the same time ; so he gave her a different parentage. However, there is no doubt that in casting Sītā in the epic he had the agricultural divinity of the same name in mind ; and he made her the daughter of the plough-bannered (Sīradhvaja) Janaka. Janaka found her in a furrow ; hence she was called *ayonijā* ('not born from the womb')<sup>3</sup>; and she did not die but returned to the womb of the earth. Very probably the goddess Ekānamśā also had some connections with fertility. The *Harivaṃśa* shows her as being worshipped with unhusked rice, parched grain and flowers.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt about her associate brother Balarāma being an agricultural divinity ; but if Weber's suggestion<sup>5</sup> is accepted, the character of Rāma Dāśarathi also is developed out of a guardian deity of agriculture known by the same name. We may point out that although the *Mahābhārata* and the early Purāṇas do not refer to any marital connection between Ekānamśā and her brothers, the *Skānda Purāṇa* seems to refer to a very old tradition, when it states that Subhadra, who is worshipped with

1. Ramgopal, *India of Vedic Kalpa Sūtras*, pp. 466-7.

2. *Hariv.*, Poona ed., II. 3.14.

3. *Rāmā.*, I. 66. 13-5 ; II. 118. 28f.

4. *Hariv.*, Poona ed., II. 101. 19.

5. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 253.



Baladeva and Vāsudeva at Jagannātha Purī, is both the sister and wife of Vāsudeva and embodies his energy.<sup>1</sup> Names may differ and myths may vary, but there is no doubt about the prevalence of the cult of a mother-goddess with two associate male gods ; and it appears that the description<sup>2</sup> of the great mother-goddess specifically as the sister of Mahendra and Viṣṇu has the adoration of a goddess and two gods in view. Nevertheless, the cults of Ekānamśā and Sītā are not one and the same but parallel developments in two different regions springing from identical social contents. Ekānamśā is a goddess of the west ;<sup>3</sup> but the worship of Sītā seems to have prevailed around Vārāṇasī and further east. Vālmīki utilised the popular legends of Sītā and Rāma to weave out his beautiful epic ; and he paints them as an ideal couple. In the early centuries of the Christian era, Rāma was recognised as an incarnation of Viṣṇu ; and the first and the seventh books were added to his work. In our opinion, there is nothing to show that Rāma Dāśarathi was adored as an incarnation of Viṣṇu several centuries before the birth of Christ ;<sup>4</sup> but he was certainly worshipped as such in the Gupta period. An inscription of the fifth century A D. refers to him as the lord of Rāmagiri (modern Rāmatek) and Kālidāsa associates him expressly with the Rāmagiri hills<sup>5</sup>. He regards all the four sons of Daśaratha as partial incarnations of Viṣṇu.<sup>6</sup> The *Br̥hat Samhitā* contains instructions for making an image of Rāma.<sup>7</sup> The *Avadānaśataka* refers to a deity mentioned as *Rāmadevatā* ;<sup>8</sup> and the *Suśruta Samhitā* prescribes the recitation of a formula invoking Mahendra, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa while collecting the medicinal herbs ;<sup>9</sup> but it is uncertain whether Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, or Balarāma, the brother of Kṛṣṇa, is meant.

1. *Skanda Purāṇa*, Utkala-Khaṇḍa, XIX. 117 quoted by Parashurama Chaturvedi, *Vaiṣṇava dharma*, pp. 123-4.

2. *mahendra-viṣṇu-bhaginī*, *Hariv.*, Poona ed., II 120.6

3. *Lalitavistara*, p. 390.

4. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii, p. 724.

5. *Infra*.

6. *Raghuvamsa*, X.

7. *Br. Sam.*, 50.30.

8. *Avadānaśataka*, *Bibliotheca Buddhica* ed., III, Vol. I p. 195

9. *Suśruta Samhitā*, *Cikitsāsthāna*, 30-27.



The *Mahābhārata* mentions the Fish<sup>1</sup> who saved Manu, and the Tortoise<sup>2</sup> who supported the earth on his back at the time of the churning of the ocean, but it does not connect them with Viṣṇu. In the Brāhmaṇas, both figure as forms of Prajāpati, the creator god;<sup>3</sup> and it appears that they were originally totems of some tribes.<sup>4</sup> A Matsya people are known to the *Rgveda*<sup>5</sup>, and Kaśyapa, the tortoise, is mentioned as the creator in the *Atharvaveda*.<sup>6</sup> In the Purāṇas the two appear as incarnations of Viṣṇu, and the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* also identifies the Tortoise with Nārāyaṇa.<sup>7</sup>

Although the number of the primary incarnations of Viṣṇu appears to have been fixed quite early as ten, their names vary in the lists given in the early Purāṇas<sup>8</sup>, and it is held<sup>9</sup> that the standard list of ten incarnations did not find general acceptance much before the eighth century A.D. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* mentions Nārāyaṇa, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Dattātreya, Māndhātā, Jāmadagnya, Rāma, Vedavyāsa, Kṛṣṇa and Kalki, and describes the first three as *divya sambhūti*s (divine incarnations) and the rest as human incarnations.<sup>10</sup> The *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>11</sup> substitutes Kṛṣṇa by the Buddha in an otherwise identical list. In the list<sup>12</sup> given in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* figure Pṛthu Vainya, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Dattātreya, Māndhātā and Kalki. Thus, it seems, Kalki was recognised as the tenth incarnation fairly early.<sup>13</sup> The legend of Kalki Viṣṇuśaśas finds place in the *Āraṇyaka Parva*<sup>14</sup>

1. *Mbh.*, III. 185.
2. *Ibid.*, I. 16. 10-1.
3. *Śat. Br.*, I.8.1 ; VII. 5.1.5 ; Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology*, p. 41 ; S.L. Katre, *op. cit.*, p. 59f ; Kamala Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 371f.
4. Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 201. Cf. A.P. Karmarkar, "The Matsyāvatāra of Viṣṇu", *Festschrift Kane*, p. 253f.
5. Raychaudhuri, PHAI, p. 67.
6. Kamala Ray, *op. cit.* ; Gonda, AEV, p. 118.
7. *Rāmā.*, I.45. 29-30 ; for the identification of the Tortoise with the thousand-headed Puruṣa in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* see R.L. Mitra, *Tai. Ār.*, Intro. pp. 18-9.
8. For various lists given in the Purāṇas, see Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii, pp. 720-1.
9. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 88.
10. *Vā. Pu.*, 98.88 ; D.R. Patil, *Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa*, p. 65.
11. *Mat. Pu.*, 47. 238-49.
12. *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, III. 73. 73-117.
13. The *Harivamśa* also speaks of him as the tenth incarnation, see Hazra *Pu. Rec.*, p. 85.
14. *Mbh.*, III. 188. 89f.



of the *Mahābhārata*. He is supposed to appear at the end of the Kali on a horse-back to uproot the mlecchas and establish the *dharma*. His conception may have been inspired by the idea of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, and in the Purāṇas it becomes the symbol of the ultimate triumph of brāhmaṇism. It is suggested<sup>1</sup> that a few elements of his story reflect some historical event.

Dattātreyā appears to have been another important incarnation of Viṣṇu mentioned in the early lists. The Purāṇas represent him as a forester given to strong spirituous liquor, surrounded by women and always in a state of ecstasy. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* he is made to say that he should be worshipped with the offerings of meat, wine, perfume and garlands to the accompaniment of music.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally he is regarded as the author of several tantric works.<sup>3</sup> and his cult appears to have been largely tantric. His worship is popular in the Mahārāṣṭra region<sup>4</sup>, and he may have been a god of some local semi-civilised tribe which was brāhmaṇised through Vaiṣṇavism.

The syncretistic character of the doctrine of incarnation is nowhere so well illustrated as in the case of the Buddha. With the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddha had become as much an object of worship and pious devotion as any other deity. Brāhmaṇical views had infiltrated Buddhism, and the Buddhists also respected the varṇa rules and the brāhmaṇas, and made large donations to them. It is not without significance that most of the celebrated scholars of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Aśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu were brāhmaṇas by birth. The Buddhist records of the Gupta period often end with an imprecation charging one who might violate the rules of the gift with the guilt of the slaughter of a brāhmaṇa.<sup>5</sup> In the fifth century A.D. the Ānanda king Dāmodaravarman, who was a worshipper of 'the truly and perfectly enlightened one' (*samyak-sambuddha*), that is, of the Buddha, claimed<sup>6</sup> to have performed such brāhmaṇical rites as Gosahasra and Hiraṅgarbha, included by the

1. Kosambi, JBBRAS, XXIV-XXV, 1948, pp. 128-9.

2. *Mārka. Pu.*, 19. 10-2.

3. E.g. *Tantra-Kaumudī*, *Śakti-Śaṅgama Tantra*, see A S. Geden, ERE, XII, pp. 192-3.

4. V.S. Agrawala, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Eka, *Sāṅskṛtik Adhyayaṇa*, p. 86.

5. CII, III, No, 5, line 10.

6. EI, XVII, No. 18.



Purāṇas in the sixteen so-called great gifts<sup>1</sup>, and made liberal land-grants to the brāhmaṇas. Thus there was no longer any difference in the social basis of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Vaiṣṇavism. The fame of *bhagavat* Nārāyaṇa was already well-established on account of his antiquity and orthodox character ; under the Gupta patronage his glory reached the apex. It was apparently during this period that the popular mind identified the Buddha, the saviour, with Nārāyaṇa. The identification of the Buddha with Nārāyaṇa was not the result of a clever machination on the part of the brāhmaṇas to absorb Buddhism, but rather a movement rooted in those social conditions which had mitigated the difference between brāhmaṇism and Buddhism, and developed Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the *Lalitavistara*, a Buddhist work in Purāṇic style and necessarily of a popular character, the Buddha is repeatedly described as *nārāyaṇa-sthāmavān*<sup>2</sup>, having the strength of Nārāyaṇa, and often he is simply referred to [as Nārāyaṇa<sup>3</sup> and Mahānārāyaṇa.<sup>4</sup> The epithet 'Mahāpuruṣa' is applied to the Buddha in the *Lalitavistara*<sup>5</sup>, and to Nārāyaṇa in the *Māhābhārata*.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it will be wrong to hold that the identification of Vāsudeva with Nārāyaṇa has its parallel in the identification of the Buddha with the same deity. In fact, whereas the first was brought about through deliberate brāhmaṇical efforts for motives discussed elsewhere<sup>7</sup>, the second was a spontaneous movement, the result of popular mythology ; and it is quite incorrect to state<sup>8</sup> as Raychaudhuri does, that the Buddhists "ignored the identification of their master" with Nārāyaṇa, for a *rapprochement* was apparently initiated by popular Buddhism.

It appears that the identification of the Buddha was not favourably received at first by the Vaiṣṇavite priestly class, which attributed to the Buddha the legend, of the celestial preceptor Bṛhaspati, who misled the asuras by preaching wrong doctrines and brought about their destruction. Sometimes they also sought to wriggle out of this

1. Hultsch, *ibid.*, p. 328.

2. *Lalitavistara* (text), Chap. VII, p. 109; p. 110 ; Chap. XV p. 234 ; Chap. XX. p. 291.

3. *Ibid.*, Chap. XV, p. 202 ; Chap. XXI, p. 211.

4. *Ibid.*, Chap. XV, p. 229.

5. *Ibid.*, Chap. XXII, p. 353 ; Chap. XXVI, p. 426.

6. *Mbh.*, XII. 325. 4, No. 8.

7. *Supra*, p. 10-12 ; 74.

8. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 109.



awkward situation, which made the founder of a heretical sect an incarnation of their own god, by giving him new parentage, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states<sup>1</sup> that the Buddha incarnation of Nārāyaṇa was born in the Magadhadeśa, as the son of Ajana.<sup>2</sup> Orthodox writers such as Kumārila did not recognise the Buddha incarnation of Nārāyaṇa<sup>3</sup>, and the *Vṛddha Hārīta Smṛti* expressly forbids the worship of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup> But in the incarnation list given in the *Sāttvata Saṃhitā*, which is repeated in the *Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā*, the Buddha is mentioned as Śāntātmā, and in the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* of Varāhamihira he is described as Śāntamanas.<sup>5</sup> The *Agni Purāṇa* also speaks of the Buddha as Śāntātmā<sup>6</sup>, and in the *Gīta Govinda* of Jayadeva Nārāyaṇa is said to have incarnated himself as the Buddha out of compassion for animals.<sup>7</sup>

To conclude, the doctrine of incarnation played a major role in mitigating regional and tribal separatism and extending brāhmaṇism to semi-civilised indigenous tribes. The syncretism effected through this doctrine was sometimes brāhmaṇical and sometimes popular in character, but to a great extent it was the reconciliatory attitude of Vaiṣṇavism which gave the country a kind of cultural unity and succeeded in establishing the same kind of social structure all over India. It also fostered hero-worship, and kings, nobles and celebrated personages were often described as incarnation of the god Hari.<sup>8</sup>

1. *Bhā. Pu.*, 1. 3.24.

2. Cf. Dikshitar, *Purāṇa Index*, I, Intro., pp. xvi-xvii.

3. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii p. 721.

4. *Ibid*, p. 720.

5. *Br. Sam.*, 58. 19.

6. *Agni Purāṇa*, 49. 7.

7. *Gīta-Govinda*, I. 1. 9.

8. CII, III, No. 35, line 11.



## RITUALS AND OBSERVANCES OF THE VAISNAVAS

Just as the mythology of Vaiṣṇavism is a complex of diverse elements assorted rather loosely within the framework of the brāhmanical cult of Viṣṇu, the rituals of the Vaiṣṇavas also are a bequest of varied traditions adapted to new conditions. Some of these relate to the ceremony of idol worship, and others to the daily or periodical observances of the Vaiṣṇavas.

The discovery of sealings and figurines of ostensible religious significance in the Harappā culture has more or less determined the issue that image worship is of pre-Āryan origin<sup>1</sup>, and it is now generally conceded that the practice developed in non-Vedic circles.<sup>2</sup> The natural mode of worship in the cults of Vāsudeva—Kṛṣṇa and Saṅkarṣaṇa appears to have been idolatry. Commenting on Manu's description of the Sāttvatas and Ācāryas<sup>3</sup> as degraded vaiśyas, Govindarāja informs us<sup>4</sup> that according to Uśanas Ācāryas and Sāttvatas subsist by serving the temples and worshipping the gods. We know that the worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa originated among the Sāttvatas with whom he was ethnically related. The fact that the Sāttvatas are described as living on image worship shows that they worshipped the idols of their deified ancestors. The practice was adopted by the Vedic priests, when fire-ritual became too expensive and went out of vogue. Yet the orthodox brāhmaṇas looked down

1. Banerjea, DHI, I ed., pp. 47 ; 112.

2. R.C. Majumdar, AIU, pp. 363-4; for the opposite view see T.A. V. Dikshitar *Bhāratiya Vidyā*, V, 1945, p. 70 ; L.A. Ravi Varma, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 448f.

3. *Msm.*, X. 23.

4. SBE, XXV, p. 407, f.n. 23.



upon such priests, and Manu states<sup>1</sup> that the temple-priests (*devalakāḥ*) should not be invited to a sacrifice offered to the gods and the manes. He regards the food given to them as wasted<sup>2</sup>; a later text goes further and forbids the people to touch, or speak to, those who live on temple service.<sup>3</sup> It is argued<sup>4</sup> that they were disapproved and ranked low because they degraded religious devotion (*bhakti*) by making it a means of livelihood, but this does not seem to be the entire explanation. The Vedic priests accepted big amounts of wealth as their officiating fees for the sacrifices performed for their patrons, and yet they were never discredited, nor were any objections raised against this practice. The *Bhagavadgītā* states<sup>5</sup> that a sacrifice in which no officiating fee is given to the priest is one of the worst kind. The inferior status of the temple priests seems to have been mainly due to their being the custodians of a non-Vedic and non-Āryan tradition.

The *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>6</sup> mentions a rule that the priests in charge of an idol in a temple (*mūrtipāḥ*) should number either thirty-two or sixteen or eight. The quadragesimal system of reckoning is traced to the Indus valley civilisation<sup>7</sup>, and in our opinion the counting of priests to be employed in the temple ritual by computations of four suggests that the practice had its roots in the Harrapa culture.<sup>8</sup> The *Śamba Purāṇa* gives the interesting information<sup>9</sup> that the temple priests (*devalakāḥ*) not only lived on the property of the images but also denounced the *Mānava Śāstra*, the code of Manu. This shows that originally the temple-priests did not accept the social rules of Manu but followed a different tradition, and this was perhaps the reason of their unfavourable position in the orthodox texts.

1. *Msm.*, III. 152.

2. *Ibid.*, v. 180.

3. *Parama Samhitā*, III. 47.

4. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, I ed., p. 97.

5. *Bhg.*, XVII. 13.

6. *Mat. Pu.*, 265.6.

7. A.D. Pusalker, in *The Vedic Age*, p. 177.

8. *The Puruṣa-sūkta*, which is a late interpolation in the *Rgveda* and is connected with the non-Vedic Nārāyaṇa, contains sixteen verses. Perhaps the deity and the ritual of human immolation were borrowings from the Harrapa culture.

9. *Śamba Purāṇa*, 26. 23b. The reading is quoted and corrected by Hazra in *St. Up.*, p. 40, f n. 21. The passage distinguishes *devalaka* brāhmaṇas of Jambūdvīpa from the Magas brought by Śāmba from the Śakadvīpa for the performance of Sun-worship. This indicates that the *devalakas* who defied the code of Manu were indigenous brāhmaṇas.



However, the position of the temple-priests and of the Sāttvatas and Ācāryas connected with the idolatrous worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa seems to have considerably improved in the Gupta period, and although Manu describes them as degraded vaiśyas, an inscription<sup>1</sup> of the fifth century A.D. speaks of Sāttvata Ācārya Yaśastrāta and his descendants as belonging to the Gautama gotra and gives him the epithet of 'Ārya'.<sup>2</sup> Apparently with the rise and progress of neo-Vaiṣṇavism the status of the Sāttvata priests was much elevated. The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that the *mūrtipas* should be faultless righteous persons well-versed in the Vedas and Purāṇas, and should be *dvijas* of high descent (*kulīna*).<sup>3</sup>

The Purāṇas state that there are two modes of worship, Vedic and Tantric. Sometimes a third type, a combination of the two (*miśrita*), is also enumerated.<sup>4</sup> The Vedic worship of images requires the recitation of various Vedic mantras (hymns) on the occasion of the performance of different acts of worship. But the relation of the mantra with the rite, to which it is assigned, is plainly superficial<sup>5</sup>, and the sole reason of its selection for the purpose seems to be that a word having some affinity with the act occurs in it although the meaning conveyed by the entire hymn is absolutely irrelevant and inappropriate.<sup>6</sup> The arbitrary nature of this connection undoubtedly proves that the Vedic mantras are a superimposition upon an extraneous ritual with which originally these had nothing to do. The Purāṇas<sup>7</sup> state that the gods were visible in their physical forms in the Satya, Tretā and Dvāpara yugas; but with the advent of the Kali they can be seen only in images. It implies that the Vedic gods who were invoked in the Vedic sacrifices to partake of the offerings

1. CII, III, No. 67. The inscription begins with an invocation to the husband of Jāmbavati indicating thereby the devotion of the Sāttvata priest to Viṣṇu in the form of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. For the Sāttvatas as the devotees of Vāsudeva see supra, p. 40.

2. Lines 3-5 of the ins.

3. *Mat. Pu.*, 265. 1-5.

4. *Bhā. Pu.*, XI. 27.7.

5. Shama Sastry, Intro. to the *Abhilaṣitārthacintāmaṇi* of Someśvara Deva, pt. I, p. viii.

6. Thus the hymn *trīṇi padā* etc (RV, I. 22.18; *Tai. Br.*, II.4.6.1, is prescribed (*Vai. Sm. Sū*, IV. 12) for the ceremonial offering of water for washing the feet of the deity evidently because it contains the word *padā* (feet) although the hymn actually means "Three steps he made, the herdsman sure, Viṣṇu and stepped across (the world)". Hopkins, *Religions of India*, p. 57.

7. E.g. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 1. 4-5; III. 92.



made into fire in their own physical forms are now in the Kali age worshipped in the form of images. The change was brought about by the identification of popular divinities worshipped in idols with the Vedic ones. This caused a synthesis in the rituals of worship with the result that idolatrous rites were harmonised with Vedic traditions and practices. For the original rituals of the worshippers of these divinities we must, therefore, look into the other, the non-Vedic or tantric, mode of worship.

We have stated earlier that the Pañcarātra cult, which had retained some pristine elements of Nārāyaṇa-worship, was generally considered Tantric and esoteric; the extant Pañcarātra works which seem to be the reproductions of similar older manuals with additions and alterations lend support to this view. In our opinion, the Tantric tendencies of the Pañcarātras do not mean that from the very beginning the Pañcarātras were worshippers of female energy in conjunction with the male energy, a meaning cannnoted by Tantricism in its narrower senses<sup>1</sup>; on the other hand, these tendencies emphasise magical and mystical formulae and rites which were supposed to lead to the attainment of mundane desires and supernatural powers and which involved the ritual use of meat, wine, fish etc. The introduction of *śakti* worship in the Pañcarātra may be a late feature<sup>2</sup>; but the cult from the very beginning seems to have had close affinities with Tantricism. It is aptly remarked that the Tantric rituals and practices were evolved in a very old age, and they “belong to a type of thought that is primitive.”<sup>3</sup> The antiquity of Tantricism is upheld by several scholars<sup>4</sup> of repute, and there is no doubt that many of the Tantric rites are the relics of a very ancient past. The silence of early brāhmaṇical texts over such rites merely indicates that these were not countenanced by the Vedic priests. But that these practices were prevalent at least among a section of the Vaiṣṇavas when the *Mahābhārata* was being redacted is shown by a verse<sup>5</sup> of the *Śānti Parva*, which

1. B. Bhattacharya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, p. 53.

2. Eliot, *Hindi. Budd*, II, p. 198.

3. A.S. Geden, *ERE*, XII, p. 192b.

4. Geden, *ibid.*, L. de la Vallee Poussin, *ibid.*, 195b, Marshall, *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilisation*, pt. I, p. 57f; B. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Arthur Avalon, *Principles of Tantra*, Intro. p. 39f; Kosambi, *ISIH*, p. 54; also see Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya; *The Lokāyata*, p. 321f.

5. *māmsa madhu surā maṭsyā āsavam kṛsaraudanam, dhurtaiḥ pravartitam hyet-annaitadvedeṣu kalpitam. kāmānmohācca lobhācca laulyametatpravartitam, viṣṇumevābhijānanti, sarvayajñeṣu brāhmaṇāḥ, payasaiḥ sumanobhiśca tasyāpi yajanam smṛtam. Mbh., XII, 257. 9-10.*



states that the offerings of meat, honey, wine, fish, distilled liquor, and rice mixed with sesamum were introduced by the rascals who were motivated by lust, ignorance and greed; and those brāhmaṇas who acknowledge Viṣṇu only in all sacrifices should worship him with rice cooked in milk (*pāyasa*) and flowers. Of the five Makāras of the Tāntrikas four are explicitly mentioned and denounced here, *madya* (alcoholic drink), *māṃsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), and *mudrā* which is often wrongly interpreted<sup>1</sup> as symbolical hand gesture but in fact means “parched cereal food of various kinds”<sup>2</sup> used in Tantric rituals and referred to in this verse as *kṛsaraudanam*, rice mixed with sesamum or peas. The objection to offerings of meat, wine etc. is quite understandable, but it is curious that the Vedic priests should denounce the offerings of rice mixed with sesamum or peas. Some Purāṇas such as the *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>3</sup>, and the Pañcarātra Samhitās, prescribe the use of sesamum mixed with rice (*tilataṇḍula*), or unmixed, and of *kṛsara* which means rice mixed with either sesamum or peas.<sup>4</sup> The *Baudhayana Gṛhya-Śeṣasūtra* also sanctions the offerings of *kṛsara*, and of sesamum mixed with clarified butter to Viṣṇu.<sup>5</sup> This shows that the use of sesamum and parched grain for religious ceremonies was considered non-Vedic, but gradually it gained recognition in the Purāṇas and other later texts. In our opinion, rituals connected with sesamum and peas mixed with rice go back to a pre-Āryan culture based on an agricultural economy and hence were disapproved by the Vedic priests who advocated the use of rice boiled in milk, a custom quite in tune with their pastoral traditions. We know that the Harappā people knew and cultivated sesamum, and its use for ritual purposes suggests that it was an agricultural discovery of no mean importance. Sesamum appears to have been connected with fertility, and the *Manu-smṛti* states that one who makes a gift of the sesamum seeds obtains desirable offspring.<sup>6</sup> According

1. Basham, *The Wonder That was India*, p. 337.

2. Arthur Avalon *Principles of Tantra*, Preface, p. 6 For the correctness of Avalon's interpretation see *The Mahānirvāna Tantra* chapter VI, which discusses in detail the five *tattvas* or the five Makāras and in discussing *mudrā*, the fourth *tattva*, speaks of various kinds of grain (vv. 9-10.)

3. *Viṣṇudh.*, I, 155. 26; 28; 160. 4f; 163. 2f;

4. E.g. *Jayā. Sam.*, XVI. 5-6.

5. *Baudh. Gr. Śsū.*, II, 13.35, Shama Sastry's ed., p. 258.

6. *Msm.*, IV, 229.



to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*<sup>1</sup> a couple desiring the birth of a son should eat rice boiled in milk but for obtaining a learned daughter they should eat rice boiled with sesamum. The passage further indicates that whereas the use of rice boiled in milk is in consonance with patriarchal outlook, the characteristic of Vedic Āryans, that of sesamum mixed with rice, is related with matriarchal traditions and points to the matriarchal-agricultural culture of the pre-Āryans of the Indus valley. In course of time the two traditions fused in the worship of the composite god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Kauśalyā is stated to have prepared curds, *akṣata*, clarified butter, *pāyasa*, and also *kṛsara*<sup>2</sup> for worshipping Viṣṇu.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is the mixed kind of worship mentioned in the Purāṇas.

Jarl Charpentier<sup>4</sup>, following Kittel, derived the word *pūjā* meaning 'worship' from the Tamil term *pūśu* or the Kanarese *pūsu*, meaning to smear or to daub, and concluded that the most characteristic feature of *pūjā* is washing or sprinkling the image with water, honey or curds, or daubing it with red paint in lieu of earlier blood-sacrifices. This is, however, disputed by some scholars<sup>5</sup>, who are of opinion that the term is formed by a combination of the Dravidian words *pū* and *cey* or *gey* meaning flower-act or *puṣpa-karma*. In face of conflicting opinions the etymology is not of much help. But we have shown earlier that the flower-ritual was evolved later under the influence of the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* replacing the earlier ritual offerings of animal-flesh, fish etc.<sup>6</sup> A passage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks of Lakṣmaṇa as offering flowers (*puṣpa-bali*) to the gods.<sup>7</sup>

The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* gives one of the earliest descriptions of the ritual of *pūjā*<sup>8</sup>. It consists of the invocation and welcome of the deity, the offering of *arghya*, or water for washing hands and feet, for

1. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, VI, 4. 14-17 ; *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, pp. 170-1.

2. *Rāmā.*, II, 20. 17-8.

3. In Bengal on the *aṣṭamī* day during the Durgā-pujā festival the goddess Durgā is offered *khicri*, which is later feasted upon communally by all worshippers of the goddess irrespective of their caste. It is well known that the cult of Durgā is predominantly tantric.

4. Jarl Charpentier, *IA*, 1927, p. 98.

5. Chintaharan Chakravarti, *IA*, 1928, p. 140; S.K. Chatterji, *JRASB*, XVI, i, Letters, 1950, p. 84.

6. *Supra*.

7. *Rāmā.*, III. 15.25.

8. *Viṣṇu-smṛti*, chap. 65.



sipping and bathing, offering the deity incense, ornaments, garments, flowers etc., and worshipping him with lamp. The *Baudhāyana* and *Vaikhānasa Gṛhya Sūtras* also contain similar accounts<sup>1</sup>, but whereas *Viṣṇu-smṛti* enjoins the recitation of Vedic mantras only the *Gṛhya Sūtra* of the Vaikhānasas sanctions the muttering of sectarian eight and twelve syllabled mantras<sup>2</sup> also and recommends the offering of the betel to the deity.<sup>3</sup> The *Viṣṇudharmottara* also prescribes the use of betel (*tāmbula*)<sup>4</sup> in worship. The practice of chewing betel leaves became popular in the early centuries of the Christian era<sup>5</sup>, and apparently it was during this period that the rites related with the daily worship of the image were systematised in these works, and were later further standardised into the sixteen acts of worship (*upacāras*) of modern times.<sup>6</sup> The use of Vedic mantras in the ceremony of worship evidently followed the identification of Viṣṇu with the non-Vedic popular divinities Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva ; but in keeping with the orthodox prejudice against the access of women and śūdras to the Vedas and the Vedic rituals, it remained confined to the members of the upper three varṇas. A passage in one of the plays of Bhāsa indicates<sup>7</sup> that a śūdra worshipped the vyūhas without using the Vedic mantras and similar injunctions are given in the Purāṇas and the Pañcarātra Saṁhitās.<sup>8</sup>

The non-Vedic or Tantric form of worship was open to all irrespective of caste, sex and age. The *Jayākhya Saṁhitā* remarks pertinently that it need not be mentioned that those who approach for initiation should be initiated ; forsooth, the entire world should be initiated.<sup>9</sup> It expressly refers to children and women initiates,<sup>10</sup> and although it recognises the superiority of a brāhmaṇa spiritual preceptor, it allows the persons of other varṇas to initiate the members

1. *Baudh. Gr. Sū.*, II. 14; *Vai. Sm. Sū.*, IV. 12.

2. *om namo nārāyaṇāya*, and *om namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya*, *Vai. Sm. Sū.*, IV. 12; X. 9.

3. Caland, *Vai. Sm. Sū. tr.*, p. 118.

4. *Viṣṇudh*, I. 63. 28.

5. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 194 ; supra.

6. For a detailed description see Thomas, *Hindu Religion, Manners and Customs*, p. 33 ; Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, II, ii, pp. 726-36.

7. Bhāsa, *Pratimā-nāṭaka*, III. 5.

8. *Viṣṇudh*, I. 155. 27-8; 157. 16-7; 163. 8-11; *Sāttvata Saṁhitā*, II. 9-10.

9. *dīkṣayenmedanīm sarvām kim punaścopasarpitān*. *Jayā. Sam.*, XVI. 10a.

10. *Ibid.*, v. 2.



of their own and of lower castes.<sup>1</sup> The work contains a detailed account of the Pañcarātra initiation (*dīkṣā*), which is quite different from the brāhmaṇical *upanayana* and seems to correspond to the Greek initiatic “rites of knowledge”. It provides for the worship of the great Tantric circle (*mahāmaṇḍala*) in the initiation ceremony of a rich person, but states that the poor may be initiated simply by word of mouth through the kindness of their spiritual preceptor and by making offerings of sesamum<sup>2</sup>. The work describes<sup>3</sup> two types of initiation, ordinary (*sāmānya*) and special (*viśeṣa*). Five kinds of special initiates are mentioned, the Samayajñas, Putrakas, Sādhakas, Ācāryas and Deśikās. Literally, the Samayajña would mean the knower of the traditional rules of conduct, and it is stated<sup>4</sup> that a Samayajña is one who, remembering the mantras, observes all the *samayas*, that is, traditional rules. It is pointed out<sup>5</sup> that there were two categories of the Tāntrikas, Kaulikas and Samayins. The former worship the gross or symbolic sex ; but the latter discard both kinds of sex-worship and confine themselves to mental imagery in worshipping the Tantric circle. However, Lakṣmīdhara refers<sup>6</sup> to a section of Samayins who perform external worship also, and Bhāskararāya<sup>7</sup> to those Samayins who sanction the use of wine. Lakṣmidhara further says<sup>8</sup> that Samayācāra is very difficult, and it can be learnt only from the preceptor. In our opinion, whatever may have been the distinctions between the Samayins and the other Tāntrikas, the emphasis on mental imagery appears to be a later development, as even in the time of Bhāskararāya there were Samayins who made the ritual use of wine and practised external worship. It seems that the Samayins were adepts in traditional Tāntric practices.<sup>9</sup>

1. *Jayā. Sam.*, XVIII. 3-9.

2. *Ibid.*, XVI. 4-6.

3. *Ibid.*, vv. 54-61.

4. *Ibid.*, XVII. 6.

5. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 209 ; H.D. Bhattacharya, *Age of Imperial Kanauj*, p. 321.

6. Lakṣmidhara's commentary on *Saundaryalaharī*, Mysore ed., p. 75 ; quoted by C. Chakravarti, *The Tantras ; Studies on Their Religion And Literature*, p. 56.

7. Bhaskararāya, *Tripurāmahopaniṣadbhāṣya* p. 15, quoted *ibid.*

8. *Gurumukhavedyaḥ samayācāraḥ* Lakṣmīdhara, quoted *ibid.*, p. 55.

9. In Tantric Buddhism Samaya is the name of the *kula* founded by the fifth Dhyāni Buddha Amoghavajra (B. Bhattacharya, *Guhyasamāja Tantra. Intro.*, p. xviii). It is generally held that Tantric Buddhism is largely derived from popular beliefs and practices.



The *Jayākhya Samhitā* states that devoted men and unmarried girls (*kanyakā*) could become Samayajñas<sup>1</sup>, next to whom ranked the Putrakas in the hierarchy of the initiates. It states that the Samayajñas, Putrakas, Sādhakas and Ācāryas should be anointed in the order of Senāpati, Māhāmantri, Yuvarāja and Rājā.<sup>2</sup> The Sādhakas, having abandoned their families and relations, strove for conquering or accomplishing the mantra and lived in solitary spots, forests, or temples of Nārāyaṇa, or even living in their homes became free from desires and worldly ties and leading a pure life endeavoured to attain their desired mantra.<sup>3</sup> After attaining the mantra one could be anointed as Ācārya.<sup>4</sup> This fourth kind of initiation is described as one which brings about the identification or union with *brahma*, the highest principle.<sup>5</sup> Deśikās were woman initiates,<sup>6</sup> and, as the first four kinds of special initiates are mentioned in an ascending order of merit, we may not be wrong in presuming that the Deśikās held the highest place among the distinguished initiates. Thus the Pañcarātra initiation is manifestly Tantric ; it appears to have developed in a society in which women held the highest position. Women votaries of the *bhagavat* were known in the age of Pāṇini, who mentions<sup>7</sup> a compound word *bhāgavatī bhāgavatam* meaning a female and a male follower of the *bhagavat*. The *Ramāyaṇa* speaks of Kauśalya as worshipping Janārdana by performing prāṇāyāma, a yogic exercise.<sup>8</sup>

The Pañcarātra texts repeatedly mention<sup>9</sup> that the Pañcarātrin should be a performer of the *pañcakālas*, which are explained<sup>10</sup> as five acts of worship performed during a day divided into five parts. The five acts are stated to be *abhigamana* or approaching the temple with one's mind, speech and body concentrated on the deity, *upādāna* or obtaining the materials for worship, *ijyā* or the performance of

1. *Jayā. Sam.*, XVI. 59.

2. *Ibid.*, XVIII. 34-5.

3. *Ibid.*, XVII. 19-23.

4. *Ibid.*, v. 46.

5. *Ibid.*, XVI. 60.

6. *Ibid.*, v. 61.

7. Pā., II.4.13 ; V.S. Agrawala, *India as known to Pāṇini*, p. 360.

8. *Rāmā.*, II.4.32.3.

9. E.g., *ibid.*, XVI.9. XXI. 104.

10. *Ibid.*, XXII. 68-74a ; *Viṣṇudh.*, I.61-5 ; the commentary of Saṅkarācārya on the *Brahma Sūtra*, II. 2.42.



worship, *svādhyāya* or hearing, meditating, discoursing and studying the sacred scriptures, and finally the performance of Yoga. However, this ritualistic division of time, described as *pañcakāla* in later works and possibly hinted at in a passage of the *Mahābhārata* is apparently a later attempt to explain the term<sup>1</sup>; the five-fold division was invented to account for the term *pañcakāla* in the same manner as numerous explanations put forward for the term *Pancarātra*.<sup>2</sup> In our opinion, the term *pañcakāla* originally referred to some rites performed five times or on the five days of the human sacrifice, the original ritual of the *Pañcarātrins*; and these in course of time acquired a symbolical and mysterious character ; and a knower of these rites came to be known as *pañcakālañña*. Perhaps both the terms *pañcakālañña* and *Samayañña* or *Samayin* are closely related in their import.

The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* ordains that the initiated person should be given a name connected with Viṣṇu, and it should convey the sense of 'lordship' or 'ownership'.<sup>3</sup> The initiate was, therefore, supposed to have acquired supernatural powers either through his introduction into the secret knowledge or because of his acquisition of the sacred mantra. The name of Ācārya, Canālasvāmin<sup>4</sup>, the spiritual preceptor of queen Prabhāvatī-guptā, conforms to the latter part of the rule, but the first half of the name sounds non-Āryan and shows that at least some non-Āryans held the high position of a priest or preceptor in the cult of Nārāyaṇa.

The twelfth day of a lunar fortnight (*dvādaśī*) was considered<sup>5</sup> the most auspicious date for the *Pañcarātra* initiation, and according to a *Purāṇa* the month of Kārttika was especially suited for it<sup>6</sup>. The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* lays down that the initiation ceremony should be kept secret from the unbelievers and only the faithful should be invited.<sup>7</sup> After the ceremony food and gifts should be distributed among the *Pañcarātra Vaiṣṇavas*.<sup>8</sup>

1. S.K. De, JRAS, 1931, p. 416.

2. Supra, p. 55f.

3. *Viṣṇuśabdānvitenaiḥ patim (ti ?) sañjñāyutena ca*, ibid.. v.127a.

4. Poona copp, pl. ins. of Prabhāvatī-guptā, line 14, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 413.

5. *Jayā. Sam.*, XVI. 89.

6. *The Skanda Purāṇa* quoted by B.K.G. Shastri, *The Bhakti cult in Ancient India*, p. 291.

7. *Jaya. Sam.*, XVI. 369.

8. Ibid., vv. 342-3.



The Pañcarātra Saṁhitās recommend the branding of Viṣṇu's weapons, the *cakra* (discus) and the *śaṅkha* (conch), on the arms of the initiate.<sup>1</sup> But the date of these works is uncertain. The ritual branding of discus is described as *cakradhāraṇa* in a late work,<sup>2</sup> and, the *Āśvamedhika Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* mentions<sup>3</sup> a *cakradhara* ascetic who could disappear at will and go anywhere he liked. It is possible that the *cakradharas* bore on their body the mark of a discus which was supposed to have magico-religious possibilities. A belief in magico-medicinal efficacies of branded or tattooed marks is found among many primitive peoples. In the Pañcarātra Vaiṣṇavism the importance of Viṣṇu's *cakra* is especially emphasised, and the *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā* asserts<sup>4</sup> that Viṣṇu is essentially of the nature of *cakra*. The *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghoṣa also speaks of the *cakradhara* ascetics who were accompanied by their women, and who, holding yoke-poles (*yugāḥ*) in their hands, half bowed their heads like the beasts of burden, when the Buddha entered the penance-grove.<sup>5</sup> It is pointed out<sup>6</sup> that Utpala, the tenth century commentator, cites *cakradhara* as a synonym of *caraka* mentioned in the *Brhajjātaka*,<sup>7</sup> and hence may be the same as *cakracara* mentioned in the *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*<sup>8</sup> and the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya.<sup>9</sup> In the Vedic literature the term *caraka* meant a wandering student, and more especially the member of a school of the Black *Yajurveda*, whose practices were looked at with disapproval.<sup>10</sup> In the *Rājadharmā*<sup>11</sup> section of the *Śānti Parva* the king is advised to turn out of the fort the *cākrikas*, apparently the same as *cakracaras*, in times of trouble, as they were regarded with suspicion. If they were the same as *cakradharas*, their prestige must have considerably enhanced with the rise of Bhāgavatism, for a passage from the *Āśvamedhika Parva* holds the *cakradhara* in high esteem. A Nāsik cave inscription of the second

1. *Para. Sam.*, III.22-3; *Īśvara Saṁhitā* XXI. 40-1, quoted by A.G. Svamin, JRAS, 1911, p.
2. *Sarva Darśana Saṅgraha*, p. 138.
3. *Mbh.* (Bombay ed.), XIV. 16. 23-4.
4. *Ahir. Sam.*, 36. 65.
5. *Buddhacarita*, VII. 3.
6. Johnston, *Buddhacarita*, tr., pp, 92-3, f.n. 3.
7. *Brhajjātaka*, XV. 1.
8. *Mbh.*, XIII. 141. 103-7.
9. *Aś.* IV. 4. 3; VII. 17. 63.
10. Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, I, p. 256.
11. *Mbh.*, XII. 69. 49.



century A.D. speaks of the large donations made by Uṣavadāta to the congregation of the *carakas*.<sup>1</sup>

The marking of the forehead and various parts of the body with the sectarian Puṇḍra mark also is an old practice with the Vaiṣṇavas. A Gupta seal from Nālandā depicting the figure of Garuḍa shows the forehead of the bird bearing a painted Vaiṣṇavite mark.<sup>2</sup> The *Vaikhānasa Śrauta Sūtra* equates the vertical middle line of the mark with the Ātman and states that at the end of a sacrifice the performer should apply on his forehead, heart, belly, arms and neck, ashes in the shape of the quadrangular mark which bestows happiness and brings about a union with the supreme soul.<sup>3</sup> As far as our knowledge goes, this happens to be the earliest reference to the sacred Puṇḍra mark.

The Vaiṣṇavite texts lay a great stress on the *japa* or repeated recitation of sacred syllables, formulae or names of the deity. The *Viṣṇu-smṛti* states that the *japa-yajña* is ten times more meritorious than the ritualistic sacrifice (*vidhi-yajña*).<sup>4</sup> The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* speaks of two kinds of worship, the external (*vāhyayāga*) which consists of the worship of the ikons and rituals connected with it, and the internal (*mānasayāga*) which requires the visualisation of a mental image of the deity and worshipping him with the help of mantra (sacred formulae), *mudrā* (symbolic hand gestures) and *nyāsa* (placing the sacred letters or mantras in different parts of the body), and which also involves the performance of the *mānasa japa* or mental recitation of the sectarian formula (*mūla mantra*).<sup>5</sup> The *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* speaks of the inhabitants of the Śvetadvīpa as constantly engaged in the recitation of *japa* named Mānasa,<sup>6</sup> which is apparently the same as mentioned in the Pañcarātra Saṃhitās. The *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* further states that the mantras are integral parts of Brahma,<sup>7</sup> and as such have immense power; even Viṣṇu, when all other methods failed, had to resort to his mantric form (*mantramaya rūpa*) for killing the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.<sup>8</sup> A belief in the magical potency of certain syllables or word formations is found in

1. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 161-2; text line 2.

2. Hiranand Shastri, MASI, No. 66, p.64.

3. *Vaikhānasa Śrauta Sūtra*, II. 6; see Caland, Preface, pp. xxi-xxii.

4. *Viṣṇu-smṛti*, 55.19.

5. *Jayā. Sam.*, XII. 112.

6. *mānaso nāma sa japo japyate tairmahātmabhih*, *Mbh.*, XII. 323. 32.

7. *Jayā Sam.*, VI. 59.

8. *Ibid.*, II. 70.



most primitive peoples. According to the Kai of New Guinea, words have their own soul-stuff; and a mere form of words may have a power of its own.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on the efficacy of the mantras is found both in the Vedic and the Tantric traditions. The Dharmaśāstras prescribe the muttering of Vedic mantras for removing such guilts as stealing and adultery,<sup>2</sup> and the Pañcarātra Saṁhitās recommend the Tantric mantras for atoning all kinds of sins.

The shifting of emphasis from costly rituals to simple *japa* must have contributed a good deal to the popularisation of Vaiṣṇavism, and the practice must have received impetus from the sentiment of *bhakti*, which made it a thing of great merit to utter the name of the chosen deity on all possible occasions. To this day *nāmasaṁkīrtana* or unbroken recitation of the names of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa is a very popular religious practice.

Our sources indicate that the Vaiṣṇavite ikons were worshipped on a communal, family and individual basis. Patañjali's reference to the sounding of musical instruments in the temples of Dhanapati, Rāma, and Keśava<sup>3</sup> shows that music and dance formed an important item of temple-worship, especially on the festival days.<sup>4</sup> According to the *Viṣṇudharmottara* the dedication of a dance, song or musical instrument, is far more meritorious than of flowers and food (*naivedya*); it fulfils all desires and equals in virtue the performance of a sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> Numerous inscriptions of the Gupta period testify to the popularity of the institution of temple-worship, and the *Jayākhya Saṁhitā* commends highly the building of a temple to which *dāsīs* (maids) and *karmmakaras* are attached. Perhaps it refers to the *deva-dāsīs* mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa*.<sup>6</sup>

The *Jayākhya Saṁhitā* contains<sup>7</sup> instructions for the installation of image in a temple and in a household and states<sup>8</sup> that the images meant for household-worship should not be made of clay, wood and stone. Only those made of metal, gold, silver or brass, should be established in a household. It is generally held that the images were,

1. Hutton, *Caste in India*, p. 186.

2. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, VI, pp. 44-51.

3. On Pā., II. 2.34. *Mahā.*, I, p. 436.

4. *Bhā. Pu.*, XI. 27. 35.

5. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 34. 25-7.

6. *Mat. Pu.*, 29. 17-23.

7. *Jayā. Sam.*, Patala XX.

8. *Ibid.*, XX. 66-9.



at first, made of wood and clay.<sup>1</sup> Metal images became popular from the Gupta period onwards. If it is accepted that metal images are a later innovation and early cult-objects were made of wood, earth and stone, which seems very probable, the injunction given in the *Jayākhya Saṃhitā* would suggest that the practice of establishing idols in individual households is only a later development, and in the beginning images were worshipped communally in a temple. The epics speak of household shrines, which seem to have been situated within the compound of the palaces of kings and houses of the rich gentry and where a worship was performed for the whole family. After entering the palace, the newly married brides of Rāma Dāśarathi and his brothers were first taken by the royal ladies to the family shrines for worship.<sup>2</sup> However, these shrines were not within the dwelling rooms. For individual worship, Vātsyāyana speaks of a niche constructed at the head of the bed of a well-to-do city-dweller (*nāgaraka*) and containing the image of his favourite deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*).<sup>3</sup>

Coming to the Vaiṣṇavite festivals, we find no mention of such popular festivals as Janmāṣṭamī, the birthday of Kṛṣṇa, and Rāmanavamī, the birthday of Rāma, son of Daśaratha, during the period under study. But the ancient festival of Cāturmāsya had become thoroughly Vaiṣṇavised and appears to have been very popular. The Purāṇas narrate that the god Viṣṇu goes to sleep on the eleventh of the bright fortnight of the month of Āṣāḍha for four months and wakes up again on the eleventh of the bright fortnight of the month of Kārttika, and during his sleep the rain-god Indra does his work.<sup>4</sup> The legend is referred to in the *Meghadūta*,<sup>5</sup> the *Mudrārākṣasa*<sup>6</sup> and the *Brhatsaṃhitā*,<sup>7</sup> and was evidently very well-known in the Gupta period. An inscription of A. D. 424 alludes to the awakening of Madhusūdana (Viṣṇu) in the month of Kārttika.<sup>8</sup> It bears the date of the thirteenth of the bright fortnight of the month of Kārttika and records the erection of a Viṣṇu temple, which was apparently comple-

1. Banerjea, DHI, I ed., p. 220-1.

2. *Rāmā.*, I. 77. 13.

3. *Kāmasutra*, p. 318. H.C. Chakladar, *Studies in Vātsyāyana's Kāmasutra*, pp. 207-8.

4. *Hariv.*, I. 50. 23 ; 26 ; *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 269; II. 153-4.

5. *Meghadūta*, *Uttaramegha*, v. 53.

6. *Mudrārākṣasa*, III. 3. 21.

7. *Br Sam.*, 43. 1-2

8. CII, III, No. 17, line 21.



ted on the sacred date. The *Viṣṇudharmottara* relates<sup>1</sup> how king Bharata of the *Ikṣvāku* lineage observed this festival. The celebrations began on the eleventh of the bright fortnight of Āṣāḍha and continued for five days during which Bharata ate only at night, made land-gifts and worshipped Janārdana. He abstained from eating meat and honey (or wine?, *madhu*) during these four months. Large scale festivities were again indulged in for five days at the approach of the end of the bright fortnight of Kārttika, and these culminated on the full-moon day. On the final day Bharata performed *mahādāna*, that is, gave away a vast amount of wealth and land to the brāhmaṇas. The description may be applicable to the practice prevalent in the Gupta age, and a good many epigraphs indicate that the land-grants were made and other pious deeds performed at the beginning and the end of the festival. The earliest epigraphic evidence recording liberal donations on the full-moon night of Kārttika is the Nāsik cave inscription<sup>2</sup> of the Śaka chief Uṣavadāta of the years 41 and 45 of his reign. The Eraṇ stone pillar inscription<sup>3</sup> of A.D. 485 records the dedication of a flagstaff of Viṣṇu by Mahārāja Mātrviṣṇu on the twelfth of the bright fortnight of the month of Āṣāḍha, and queen Prabhāvatī-guptā seems to have made regular donations on or just after the sacred eleventh of the Kārttika.<sup>4</sup> One of her inscriptions suggests that the gifts were first offered to the deity<sup>5</sup> and then were accepted by the priests. An inscription<sup>6</sup> of A.D. 490 records the grant of a village named Purohita-pallikā by king Vyāghrasena to a brāhmaṇa Nāgaśarman on the fifteenth of the bright fortnight of Kārttika, and it is suggested<sup>7</sup> that Nāgaśarman was the family priest (*purohita*) of the king. Some other inscriptions of the fifth-sixth centuries recording land gifts refer to the last day of the festival as Mahākārttikī<sup>8</sup> or Mahākārttika Pūrṇamāsī.<sup>9</sup>

None-the-less, the Cāturmāsya festival, which included the śayanī (the day on which Viṣṇu's slumber commenced) and

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 269. 1-10.

2. EI, VIII, No. 8, xii.

3. CII, III, No. 19.

4. Cf. Poona copp. pl. ins. and Rithpur copp. pl. ins. of Prabhāvatī-guptā, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 411f; 415f.

5. *bhagavatpāda-mūle nivedya*, Sircar, *ibid.*, p. 413 line 14 of the ins.

6. EI, XI, No. 21.

7. Hultzsch, *ibid.*, p. 220.

8. The Sunao Kala plates of Sangamasimha of A.D. 541, CII, IV, pt. i, No. 11, line 12.

9. *Ancient India*, No. 5. pp. 47-8, pl. XXI-XXII.



*prabodhanī* (the day of Viṣṇu's awakening) *ekādaśīs* (the eleventh of the fortnight) and culminated in the Mahākārttika-Pūrṇima day, was originally associated with some fertility cult. The period synchronises with the sowing and reaping of the rice and the sugarcane crops, and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* states<sup>1</sup> that women should worship *śakaṭa* (an implement for preparing grain) and *ulūkhala* (a wooden mortar used for cleansing rice) with sugarcane or sugarcane products on the fifteenth of the bright fortnight of Kārttika. It is curious that the eating of sesamum and oil is expressly forbidden. On the popular *deoṭhāna ekādaśī* (*prabodhanī ekādaśī*) women affix five sugarcane shoots on the kitchen door and perform worship with eatables prepared with sugarcane products. Apparently, neo-Vaiṣṇavism assimilated and adapted to its requirements an ancient popular festival. The antiquity and popularity of this festival are well borne out by the Jātakas which refer to it several times.<sup>2</sup>

Another popular practice adopted by Vaiṣṇavism was the observing of *vratas* or vows which required total or limited abstinence from food and the execution of certain acts of worship. It is pointed out<sup>3</sup> that the rituals connected with such acts as the selection of a date, lying on the ground, appointing of a priest, fasting, listening to tales, have their counterparts in Vedic rituals. The Purāṇas mention a large number of *vratas*, but these portions are considered generally to be post-Gupta. Nevertheless, the practice is certainly much older. In the Nānāghaṭ inscription queen Nāyānikā is described as devoted to the observance of the *vratas*<sup>4</sup> and a Nāsik epigraph speaks of queen Balaśrī as one who is eagerly engaged in the observance of fasts.<sup>5</sup> The *vratas* were quite popular in the Gupta period also, and Kālidāsa mentions that the mother of Duṣyanta observed a fast (*upavāsa*) which was to end on the fourth day. It is probable that some of the numerous Vaiṣṇavite *vratas* mentioned in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* and other Purāṇas were known and observed in the Gupta period. A verse in the *Padirruppattu*, an early Tamil

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, II. 35.37-42.

2. Cowell, *The Jātakas*, Vol. I, pp- 261 ; 312-3 ; 320 ; Vol. II, p. 254, Vol. V, pp. 109 ; 134.

3. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 240.

4. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 187, text line 5.

. Ibid., p. 198, text lines 9-10.



anthology of the Śaṅgam age, refers to the custom of fasting in the precincts of a Viṣṇu temple for gaining the favour of the deity.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Vaiṣṇavite rituals and religious observances of post-Maurya and Gupta times contain a good deal of antiquated as well as newly formulated material presented in a Vaiṣṇavite and often pro-brāhmanical garb.

1. Nilakanta Sastri in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II, p. 565.



## EXTENT OF INFLUENCE

### *Vaiṣṇavism and the people*

In the centuries following the reign of Aśoka, the cult of Vedic sacrifices, which involved animal killing, had become quite unpopular, and idolatrous cults based on devotion were attracting people and gaining their favour. The onslaughts of Buddhism and other heterodox sects had damaged the prestige and authority of the Vedic institutions and the brāhmaṇas. The brāhmaṇas, whose position was seriously jeopardised by the decrease in demand for the sacrifices, were now compelled to resort to some different means of livelihood, and they turned their attention to the numerous cults of tribal and non-Āryan divinities. Brāhmaṇa infiltration into these cults could not have been sudden, and it is probable that some of the brāhmaṇas had assumed the role of the priests of these cults much earlier ; but the movement to accord orthodox sanction to the worship of these divinities seems to have begun only when new economic and political factors were seriously threatening the existing social order. The period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 witnessed the rise of many new arts and crafts and a remarkable progress in trade and industry,<sup>1</sup> which inevitably resulted in the improvement of the status of the lower varṇas, especially the śūdras, engaged in these pursuits.<sup>2</sup> The advent of foreign peoples in considerable numbers further loosened the fetters of brāhmaṇical social system. The Vedic religion with its extreme conservative attitude towards the lower varṇas was quite inadequate to cope with the new forces, and Buddhism was gaining tremendous popularity. It was with a view to combat Buddhism and preserve the

1. Radha Kumud Mookerji, AIU, p. 599.

2. Sharma, *Śū Anc. Ind.*, p. 218f.



brāhmaṇical social order that the brāhmaṇas appropriated the popular cults commanding a significant following and remodelled them to suit existing social conditions by incorporating the principle of non-violence and inculcating the spirit of devotion and obedience to authority. They adopted a liberal attitude towards women and the lower classes but took care to safeguard the divisions of society on varṇa basis. A study of Vaiṣṇavism in its formative period clearly reveals how the religion arose with the identification of the popular divinities with the brāhmaṇical god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu in an attempt to brāhmaṇise the popular cults, and how Vaiṣṇavism helped the upper classes to preach the varṇa ethics and reconcile the masses to social inequality.

There are hardly any records of a popular kind which could give us an adequate view of the beliefs and the faith of the masses ; but fundamental ideas working in the conception of a deity, and some of the myths about him, often give some indication of his original character and the social and economic condition of his worshippers. We have stated earlier<sup>1</sup> that the implements of Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa and his exploits denote his popularity among the agricultural class. The legends of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, who looms large in the *Mahābhārata* epic, needed a separate appendix in the form of the *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*. The erotic trend of his tales, the simple setting of his childhood against a pastoral background, and his superhuman exploits are eminently suited to a rustic mind, and betray their popular character. Manu describes<sup>2</sup> the Sāttvatas, among whom Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was born, as the descendants of the vaiśya *vrātyas*. It shows that although the Sāttvatas did not conform strictly to the varṇa order, they had some affinity with the third varṇa which was assigned to the pursuit of agriculture and trade. Perhaps, it was only at a later stage that the tribe of Kṛṣṇa was assigned a kṣātriya status. The cult of Śrī, the fertility goddess, was by far the most popular among traders, merchants and agriculturists,<sup>3</sup> who comprised the vaiśya and the śūdra castes ;<sup>4</sup> her recognition as the wife of Viṣṇu led to the penetration of Vaiṣṇavism among the vast masses.

1. Supra, p. 53-4.

2. *Msm.*, X. 23.

3. Supra, p. 93.

4. For the association of śūdras with agricultural operations see Sharma, *Śū. Anc., Ind.*, p. 147f.



In fact, the very nature of syncretism effected in Vaiṣṇavism, the assimilation of divinities as incarnations, forms and subordinate associates, indicates the welding together of popular divinities in a brāhmanical mould.

Thus, it is apparent that the cults of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Saṅkarṣaṇa had non-Vedic popular roots. Their identification with the orthodox god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu led to the brāhmanisation of their cults.<sup>1</sup> It is stated<sup>2</sup> that the main burden of the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* is to establish the identity between Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa and Nārāyaṇa. We may point out that the eulogy of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu uttered by Nārada in this section contains 169 epithets of the deity, most of which are connected with brāhmaṇas,<sup>3</sup> ascetics and sacrifices. This shows the dominance of brāhmanic ideology in the syncretistic cult of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva. Nārāyaṇa, a powerful divinity of non-Āryan origins, was brāhmanised at a very early date, for the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* links him with the *Puruṣa-sūkta* hymn, which is the earliest document mentioning the four-fold division of the castes. This shows clearly that at least a section of his votaries had accepted the varṇa system at the time of the composition of this text. We have shown earlier<sup>4</sup> that there were two kinds of Nārāyaṇa worshippers, those who disregarded the varṇa rules and stuck to early ritual and practices in some form were known as the Pañcarātras, but those who accepted the brāhmanical system and the authority of the Vedas were known as the Bhāgavatas. The Pañcarātra form of worship may have prevailed among the lower classes, but since our sources almost invariably refer only to the point of view of the

1. Eliot also is of opinion that Nārāyaṇa was a brāhmanic deity and Vāsudeva unbrāhmanic. Eliot, *Hind., Budd.*, II, p. 200.

2. Bhandarkar, VSMRS, p. 45.

3. One of these epithets, the *pañcamahākalpa* (No. 99) is quite interesting. The commentator explains it as 'one who is the topic of the five foremost scriptures, those of Sauras, Śaktas, Gaṇeśas, Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. The explanation is accepted by some scholars (Mrinal Dasgupta, *IHQ*, VII, p. 343; A.P. Karmarkar, *The Religions of India* p. 218). Hopkins (*The Great Epic of India*, p. 115) doubts it on the ground that the worshippers of Gaṇeśa are not known or recognised in the *Mahābhārata*, but he does not offer any alternative explanation. We may direct attention to a passage in the *Viṣṇudh.* (II.5. 3-5), which mentions the five *kālpas* as the *naksatra-kalpa*, *Vaitāna kalpa*, *samhitā-kalpa*, *āṅgirasa-kalpa* and *śānti-kalpa*. These are the five branches of the *Atharvaveda Samhitā* (Vi. Pu., III. 6.13-14.). According to the *Viṣṇudh.* the *Acārya* of the king must have a thorough knowledge of these. The epithet once again emphasises the connection of the deity with the priest class.

4. *Supra*, pp. 44-6.



higher sections of society, it is difficult to assess the extent of popularity it enjoyed among the masses. Perhaps, with the progress and popularity of Bhāgavatism the Pañcarātra lost much ground, and as the brāhmaṇisation of this cult also had begun in the Gupta period, it seems to have been absorbed eventually into Vaiṣṇavism.

As early as the first century B.C. high caste rulers are known to have patronised Bhāgavatism. An inscription of the twelfth regnal year of a king Bhāgavata speaks of the erection of a Garuḍa pillar by a Bhāgavata, son of Gotamī.<sup>1</sup> As the name suggests, king Bhāgavata, identified with the last but one Śuṅga king, apparently had leanings towards Bhāgavatism. Another inscription<sup>2</sup> of the first century B.C. speaks of a Bhāgavata king Sarvatāta, a Gājāyana, son of a lady of Parāśara gotra, who performed an Aśvamedha sacrifice and also had an enclosing wall built for *bhagavat* Saṅkarṣaṇa and *bhagavat* Vāsudeva in the compound of the god Nārāyaṇa (*nārāyaṇa-vāṭikā*). Sarvatāta, in the opinion of some scholars,<sup>3</sup> was a Kāṇva king. The Kāṇvas are supposed to have been brāhmaṇas of Kāṇvāyana gotra. The Purāṇas<sup>4</sup> also speak of a Kāṇva king, Nārāyaṇa. Apparently Bhāgavatism was quite popular with the brāhmaṇical ruling classes.

In the early centuries preceding and succeeding the Christian era, the entry of foreign tribes into India produced a favourable impact on the cults of Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite divinities, which, on the whole, enjoyed the support of the foreigners. The Greeks identified Kṛṣṇa with Herakles and Saṅkarṣaṇa with Dionysos, and it is no wonder that they were favourably inclined towards their worship. The Besnagar inscription describes the Greek ambassador Heliodorus as a Bhāgavata who dedicated a Garuḍa banner to lord Vāsudeva. In the first quarter of the first century A.D.<sup>5</sup> Toṣā, a lady, whose name betrays her foreign extraction, had the images of the five heroes (*pañcavīras*) of the Vṛṣṇis installed during the rule of Śoḍāsa, son of Mahākṣatrapa Rañjuvula. Another inscription<sup>6</sup> of the time of

1. ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 190.

2. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 91-2.

3. J.C. Ghose, IHQ, IX, p. 195-9.; D.R. Bhandarkar, EI, XXII, p. 205 ; N.P. Chakravarti, ASIAR, 1934-5, p. 55f.

4. Cf., *Vi. Pu.*, IV. 24. 40-1.

5. EI, XXIV, No. 27.i.

6. Ibid., vii.



Mahākṣatrapa Śodāsa records the construction of a gateway and railing of the temple of *bhagavat* Vāsudeva and prays for an increase in the length and strength of his rule. The Kuṣāṇa kings, although devoted to Buddhism and Śaivism in general, were not averse to Vaiṣṇavite influence. One of the Kuṣāṇa monarchs bore the name of the deity Vāsudeva. A deity holding a discus in one of the hands and an ūrdhvaliṅga in another is represented on a gold coin of Huviṣka. It is suggested that it is the precursor of an image of the composite god Hari-Hara.<sup>1</sup> A seal-matrix, showing a figure standing with folded hands before a four-armed deity, bears the names of Mihira, Viṣṇu and Śiva in Tocharian script.<sup>2</sup> The devotee was identified with Huviṣka by Cunningham on account of his head-dress and garments, although according to another suggestion it represents a Hephthalite Hūṇa chief.<sup>3</sup> The Śaka satraps of Western India also appear to have patronised the brāhmaṇical cults, and although none of the Vaiṣṇavite deities is specifically mentioned the inscriptions of Uṣavadāta, son-in-law of Nahapāna (c119-24 A.D.), speak of his liberal donations to the blessed gods and brāhmaṇas.<sup>4</sup> The influence of Vaiṣṇavism may be noted in some of the names of Buddhist Śaka devotees, whose gifts are recorded in the caves at Nāsik. An inscription of the time of the Ābhīra king Iśvarasena records an endowment made by a Śaka woman Viṣṇudattā.<sup>5</sup> Another mentions a Śaka Vudhika, the son of Viṣṇudattā, an inhabitant of Daśapura.<sup>6</sup> In A.D. 402 a Sanakānīka feudatory, the son of Mahārāja Viṣṇudāsa and grandson of Mahārāja Chagalaga, made the dedication of a Viṣṇu image at Udayagiri.<sup>7</sup> The Sanakānīkas were perhaps foreigners, or non-Āryan, as is suggested by the name Chagalaga, but the second generation bore a Sanskrit name indicating devotion to Viṣṇu. Similarly, if the opinion of Charpentier is accepted, the name of the governor of Saurāṣṭra, Paṇḍadatta, was the Indianised form of Fārn-dāta, an Iranian name.<sup>8</sup> Apparently Paṇḍadatta and his son

1. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., pp. 123-4.

2. Ibid., p. 124.

3. Ibid.

4. *bhagavatām devānām brāhmaṇānām ca*, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 159, l. 5, of the ins.; also see p. 161, line 1 of the ins.

5. EI, VIII. p. 88f. Nasik cave ins. no. xv.

6. Ibid., no. xxvi.

7. Fleet, CII, III, No. 3.

8. Jarl Charpentier, JRAS, 1928, pp. 904-5.



Cakrapālita, whose devotion to Viṣṇu is testified by the Junāgarh inscription of Skanda-gupta,<sup>1</sup> were Indianised Persians. The instances adduced above illustrate sufficiently well the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism among the foreign tribes.

Evidently Vaiṣṇavism played a significant role in Āryanising foreigners and non-Āryans, who unlike Mohammedans in later times, did not have a strong creed of their own nor a well-developed culture. The *Manu-smṛti* relates<sup>2</sup> that the Paundrakas, Coḍas, Draviḍas, Kāmbojas, Yavanas (Greeks), Śakas (Scythians), Pāradas, Pahlavas (Parthians), Cīnas, Kirātas, and Daradas have gradually fallen to the state of śūdras on account of their neglect of the sacred rites and the brāhmaṇas ; and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states that the Kirātas, Hūṇas, Āndhras, Pulindas, Pulkasas, Ābhīras, Kaṅkas, Yavanas Khasas and similar other sinful tribes are purified by worshipping Viṣṇu.<sup>3</sup> Thus Vaiṣṇavism provided a powerful instrument for assimilating and adjusting these tribes into the brāhmaṇical social order. Manu's stringent rules against those brāhmaṇas who dwelt in the country of a śūdra ruler<sup>4</sup> and taught śūdra pupils seem to include<sup>5</sup> those who propagated brāhmaṇical cults among alien and non-Āryan rulers and accepted their patronage. There is hardly any evidence to show<sup>6</sup> that the Śaka and Kuṣāṇa rulers followed a policy of religious persecution, but their entry no doubt upset the prevalent socio-economic order. The *Mahābhārata*<sup>7</sup> and the *Purāṇas*<sup>8</sup> referring to the contemporary conditions lament the breakdown of the varṇa system when the śūdras would acquire high positions and the high caste people would be compelled to take up occupations contrary to the orthodox practice. It was during this period that the brāhmaṇas assimilated popular cults into Bhāgavatism and the original indifferent, if not hostile, attitude of these cults was made to conform to the Vedic traditions, which in the Vaiṣṇavism of the Gupta period manifested itself in full measure. The *Gītā* preaches the principle of

1. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 308, lines 26-7.

2. *Msm.*, X. 43-4.

3. *Bhā. Pu.*, II.4.18.

4. *Msm.*, IV. 61.

5. Sharma, *Śū. Anc. Ind.*, p. 187.

6. For this view, see Raychaudhuri, *EHVS*, pp. 164-5 ; K.P. Jayaswal, *The History of India, 150 A.D.—350 A.D.*, pp. 41-8.

7. *Mbh.*, III. 184. 29f ; 188. 18-84.

8. For references see Jayaswal, *op. cit.*, p. 46 and f.n.



devotion against the background of the varṇa discipline, and in the second century A.D. King Gautamiputra of the Sātavāhana family of mixed blood and non-Āryan origins is declared to be a unique supporter of the brāhmaṇas,<sup>1</sup> and an upholder of the varṇa system<sup>2</sup>.

The Kuṣāṇa kings, who attempted their deification by adopting the title of *devaputra*, the son of god,<sup>3</sup> erected shrines, described as *devakulas*,<sup>4</sup> containing the statues of their dead ancestors. The repair of these *devakulas* was considered a meritorious act<sup>5</sup>. Very probably these were established on the example of the temples housing the Vṛṣṇi divinities, whose worship seems to have been quite popular among the foreigners. The term *devakula*, connoting 'a temple' or 'deity-house', may also mean the family (*kula*) of the deity; and it is probable that it was at first used for those shrines which contained the images of several deities belonging to the same family, such as the shrines of the Vṛṣṇi heroes. The Kuṣāṇa kings applied this to the shrines dedicated to their ancestors. In the *Pratimā-nāṭaka* of Bhāsa, Bharata mistakes the *devakula* containing the images of his four dead ancestors as a shrine of the gods, apparently the four Vṛṣṇi gods, Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. This may suggest that the ancestral shrines of royal families, of which the Kuṣāṇas only provide a historical instance, were built on the analogy of the Vṛṣṇi shrines.

The apotheosis of Kuṣāṇa monarchs made a deep impress on the contemporary and subsequent rulers, some of whom appear to have attempted at their deification. The coins of the so-called Pañcāla series ascribed to a period<sup>6</sup> between c. 50 B.C.-A.D. 300 bear witness to this practice; thus the coins of Agnimitra have a figure of Agni personified on the reverse, those of Viṣṇumitra the figure of Viṣṇu, and the coins of Bhānumitra and Sūryamitra solar emblems. It is suggested that "the issuers of these coins were inclined to identify themselves" with the deities represented on the reverse.<sup>7</sup> Although the evidence is not definite, since the kings might as well have referred to their devotion to a particular deity, it may indicate their claim of a more intimate relationship with the deity.

1. D.R. Bhandarkar, EI, XXII; p. 32f.

2. EI, VIII, p. 60f, Nasik cave ins., no. ii, lines 6-7.

3. Sharma, *Political Ideas etc.*, p. 173f.

4. ASIAR, 1911-12, p. 124, see line 3 of the ins.

5. D.R. Sahnī, JRAS, 1924, p. 402 lines 2-5 of the ins.

6. D.C. Sircar, AIU, p. 172.

7. Ibid.



With the Gupta Kings, however, we are on surer grounds. Banerjea remarks that the halo round the head of Kuṣāṇa kings on their coins points to their pretensions to divinity ;<sup>1</sup> we may note that this feature is retained on the Gupta coins where the king is invariably represented nimbate. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra-gupta speaks of the king as equal to the gods Varuṇa, Indra and Antaka (yama), and describes him as one who is inconceivable, who causes the rise of good and the destruction of evil, and who has a compassionate and tender heart, which may be won over simply by devotion and homage.<sup>2</sup> It is reminiscent of the famous Gītā verse, which speaks of the deity incarnating himself periodically for the same purpose.<sup>3</sup> The point is further stressed in the following verse, which states that the king is a mortal only so far as he performs the rites and observances of human beings, otherwise, he is god.<sup>4</sup> Many of the king's actions are not similar to those of mortals.<sup>5</sup> He is described as *pṛthivyāmapratirathaḥ*, a matchless warrior on earth.<sup>6</sup> Apratiratha is a name of Viṣṇu in the list of his one thousand names.<sup>7</sup> Samudra-gupta assumed this title on his archer type coins. Allan remarks that the representation of the king with a bow in his hand, on these coins, alludes to Viṣṇu as *śārṅgin*,<sup>8</sup> the wielder of the bow.

The title Apratiratha was also adopted by another Gupta king, Candragupta II. Chhabra<sup>9</sup> draws attention to a phrase *svayamcāpratirathaḥ* used for Candragupta II in the Bhitari inscription of Skandagupta,<sup>10</sup> and interprets it as one who was Apritaratha incarnate. In our opinion, Chhabra is quite justified in his conclusion that the inclusion of *svayam* in the phrase could not be just casual ; it is repeated in the Bihar stone pillar inscription of Skandagupta.<sup>11</sup> The royal

1. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 38.

2. CII, III, No. 1 line 25.

3. *Bhg.*, IV. 8; see D.C. Sircar, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 131.

4. *lokasamaya-kkriyānuvidhāna-mātra-mānuṣasya lokadhāmno devasya*. CII, III, No. 1, line 28.

5. Ibid., line 9.

6. Ibid., line 24.

7. *Viṣṇu Sahasranāma*; Gita Press, vv. 81.

8. Allan, *Cat. Gupta coins.*, p. lxxii.

9. Chhabra, JNSI, IX, pl. ii, p. 137f.

10. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 313, line 4.

11. Ibid., p. 318, line 20.



panegyrists apparently alluded to the divine character of their lords and subtly suggested their identity with Viṣṇu.<sup>1</sup> The Cakra-Vikrama type of gold coins of Candragupta II bears the representation of the king nimbate, receiving three round objects from a deity who is variously identified as Viṣṇu or Cakra-puruṣa, the personification of Viṣṇu's weapon *cakra* (discus).<sup>2</sup> The three balls are supposed<sup>3</sup> to represent the three elements constituting the regal power, namely, *prabhu-śakti* ('the majesty or the pre-eminent position of the king himself'), *mantra-śakti* ('the power of good counsel') and *utsāha-śakti* ('the power of energy').<sup>4</sup> The scene may imply that the king who obtained his kingdom through the will of the deity was divinely authorised to rule it. On some of the gold coins of Candragupta II the legend read *deva-śrī-mahārājādhirāja śrī-candraguptaḥ*.<sup>5</sup> The occurrence of the terms *deva* before his name is pertinent, and is indicative of his claims to divinity.<sup>6</sup> It does not seem to refer simply to his second name Deva-gupta, for the term is applied to Kumāra-gupta also. Thus, the legend on the Aśvamedha coins of Kumāra-gupta reads, *devo jitaśatruḥ kumāra-gupta-dhirājaḥ*,<sup>7</sup> the divine king of kings, Kumāra-gupta, who has vanquished the enemies.

1. It is suggested the Viṣṇu image at Eran bears a close resemblance to the portrait of Samudra-gupta on his coins, and that the Varāha image at Udayagiri is reminiscent of Candragupta II rescuing Dhruva Devī. See Jayaswal, JBORS. XVIII, p. 33f; XIX, pp. 119-21; Kalipada Mitra, JBORS, XX, p. 101f.
2. C. Sivaramamurti (JNSI, XIII, p. 180-2) and V.S. Agrawala (JNSI, XVI, pp. 97-100, XVII, p. 122) identified the deity with Cakrapuruṣa, but Altekar (*The Bayana Hoard*, p. xcif. ; also see R.P. Chanda, JNSI, XXII, pp. 261-3) insisted on his earlier view (JNSI, X pt. ii, p. 104) identifying the deity with Viṣṇu. The former identification appears to be more correct in view of the legend *cakra-vikramaḥ* on the reverse. It is to be noted that the reverse legend of Candragupta II's coinage usually refers to the figures represented on the coins. Thus the legend on his Lion-slayer type reads *simha-vikramaḥ* on the Archer type, which has a figure of Lakṣmi on the reverse *sri-vikramaḥ*. Apparently Cakra and Vikrama refer to the deity and the king respectively.
3. C. Sivaramamurti, op. cit.; Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p. xcii.
4. V.S. Apte, SED, s.v. *śakti*.
5. Altekar, op. cit. lxxxix.
6. K.P. Jayaswal draws attention to the benedictory verse (*bharata-vākya*) in the play *Mudrārākṣasa*, which confers a blessing upon a king Candragupta, described as Viṣṇu on earth in a human form. In the opinion of Jayaswal the play was written in the time of Candragupta II of the Gupta dynasty. and the verse refers to Candragupta as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.
7. Altekar, op. cit., cviii-cix.



Kumāra-gupta was the first monarch to assume<sup>1</sup> the title of *parama-daivata*, which was later adopted by several of his successors. The term is usually translated as “the devout worshipper of the devas”<sup>2</sup> but, in the opinion of Raychaudhuri,<sup>3</sup> U.N. Ghoshal<sup>4</sup> and some others the Gupta inscriptions use it in the sense of ‘the supreme divinity’. According to Ghoshal the epithet carries with it “the idea of super-human excellence”. This has been disputed by some scholars who regard it merely as a variant of *parama-bhāgavata*, *parama-māheśvara* *parama-saugata*’ and similar other titles. However, we may point out that while *bhāgavata*, *māheśvara*, *saugata* etc. are clearly derivations from *bhāgavat*, *maheśvara* and *sugata* and are never used to denote the deity himself, the term *daivata* often occurs in the sense of a god in passages which must be ascribed to the early centuries of the Christian era. In the third act of the *Pratimā-nāṭaka* of *Bhāsa* alone *daivata* is used as many as seven times in the sense of a deity. The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* speaks of Viṣṇu as *daivatam devatānām*,<sup>5</sup> the deity among deities, and in the *Harivaṃśa*<sup>6</sup> Kṛṣṇa tells the cowherds that the cows are their supreme deity (*daivatam-param*). The *Manu-smṛti* uses the expression *paramam daivatam* in exalting every person of the brāhmaṇa class as a very great deity’.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, a faithful woman is made to say that she regards her husband as *daivatam-param*, the highest deity among all gods.<sup>8</sup> A little later, the pious Fowler, telling the secret of his virtue to the brāhmaṇa, Kauśika, says that to him his father and mother are his *parama-daivata*, the supreme gods, and he tries to gratify them with offerings of flowers, fruits and gems.<sup>9</sup> The author or the authors of these passages, no doubt, wished to emphasise the virtues of devotion to the brāhmaṇas, husband and parents; and so exalted them to the position of the supreme divinity. It is difficult to agree with the view that the

1. The Dhanaidaha copp. pl. ins., l. 2. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 280.

2. E.g. N.K. Bhattashali, EI, XXVII, No. 5, p. 23.

3. Raychaudhuri, PHAI, p. 559.

4. Ghoshal, *A History Of Indian Political Ideas*, pp. 397-8.

5. *Mbh.* (vul), XIII, 149. 10.

6. *Hariv.*, Chitrashala Press, Poona, I ed., II; 16.2.4.

7. *sarvathā brāhmaṇāḥ pūjyāḥ paramam daivatam hi tat.* *Msm.*, IX, 319; for a rendering of the phrase see Bühler’s tr., SBE, XXV, p. 339.

8. *Mbh.*, III. 197. 29; also see vv. 12 and 23.

9. *Ibid.*, 204. 20; also v. 17. In this context *daivata* invariably means a deity. Refer *ibid.*, III. 196. 6; 204.6 ; 9; 205. 12.



Gupta kings, who appear with a nimbus or *prabhāmaṇḍala* round their heads on the coins, a sign of divinity, did not suggest that they were partial incarnations of Viṣṇu in assuming the title *parama-daiyata*. The fact that they are also described as *parama-bhāgāvata* does not contradict our view, for even Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Nārāyaṇa, who are recognised as incarnations of the *bhagavat* Viṣṇu, are described as the ardent devotees of the supreme deity. Thus in our opinion the title *parama-daiyata* was assumed to add to the glory of the king and to emphasise his divinity. The title was assumed by Budha-gupta also.<sup>1</sup> We may further examine some coin legends of Kumāra-gupta. On his lion-Trampler type coins the legend reads<sup>2</sup> *sākṣādiva narasiṃho siṃhamahendro jayatyaniśam*, 'the lion (among men)-Mahendra is, as it were, Narasimha incarnate'. The exaltation of the king as a veritable incarnation of the god Narasimha is obvious. Another of his coin legend speaks of him as an Indra on the earth.<sup>3</sup> We do not have much evidence in case of his successor Skanda-gupta, but it is suggested<sup>4</sup> that the epithet *sudhanvī* (a good archer) appearing on the Archer type gold coins of Skanda-gupta alludes to Viṣṇu by implication.

In the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas the divinity of king-ship is often stressed, and Viṣṇu is associated with it. The *Bhagavad-gītā* states that the king should be treated as a manifestation of the godhead amongst men.<sup>5</sup> The passage may not mean much, for the king might have been described as such because of his superior position, and may not indicate his deification. But in some other passages of the epic the deification of king and his recognition as a partial incarnation of Viṣṇu are palpable. In the *Rājadharmā* section of the *Śānti Parva*,<sup>6</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira queries why it is that a king, a mortal in every respect, has the whole world bowing unto him as it does unto a god. In answer, Bhīṣma relates the story of Pṛthu Vainya, and states that in the Kṛta age kingship did not exist; people lived peacefully and helped each other. But with the

1. Damodarpur copp. pl. ins., line 1; Sircar. op. cit., pp. 324, 328.

2. Allan, *Cat. Gupta coins*, pp. 72f.

3. Altekar, op. cit., p. c.

4. Chhabra, op. cit., p. 144.

5. *Bhg.*, X. 27; also see *Viṣṇudh.*, I. 56. 26.

6. *Mbh.*, XII. 59.



passage of time, corruption set in, and pious acts and sacrifices were, no longer, performed. Then the gods approached Viṣṇu to recommend a mortal who deserved superiority over all others. Viṣṇu created a son, Virajas, out of his own energy. Pṛthu Vainya was born in this line, and was eighth from Viṣṇu in descent.<sup>1</sup> The sages made him promise that he would stop the intermixture of castes and protect the brāhmaṇas;<sup>2</sup> and Viṣṇu, along with Indra and other deities, ṛṣis and brāhmaṇas, consecrated Pṛthu Vainya and made him insurmountable. The account further tells us that by virtue of the severe austerities performed by the king Viṣṇu himself entered his body.<sup>3</sup> Hence it is that the whole world bows down before the king who is a deity among human deities. Why else should people live in obedience to him, but for the divinity in him,<sup>4</sup> it is pertinently asked; and the explanation offered is that the royal soul after the exhaustion of his merit comes down to earth, well versed in the science of politics. Such a person obtains wisdom and majesty, and is really a portion of Viṣṇu on earth.<sup>5</sup> The narrative ends with a definite conclusion, *devāśca naradevāśca tulyāḥ*, there is no difference between the kings and the gods.<sup>6</sup>

In this account we may distinguish between two conceptions of Viṣṇu's relations with kingship. At first, Viṣṇu is said to have created Virajas by the fiat of his will (*mānasaputra*); thus he is the progenitor of the first line of kings. But, later Viṣṇu is described as having entered the body of the king; and as such king Pṛthu was virtually an incarnation of Viṣṇu. We may observe that the former notion corresponds to Kuṣāṇa professions of their divine descent, but the latter view, by identifying Pṛthu with a portion of Viṣṇu, points to the contentions of the Gupta kings. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>7</sup> Vairāja, the great-grandfather of Pṛthu Vainya, is the son of Manu; the story of his descent from Viṣṇu is evidently a later emendation. It has been shown<sup>8</sup> how a Mahāyāna Buddhist text, the *Suvarṇapra-*

1. Ibid., v. 118.

2. Ibid., v. 114.

3. Ibid., v. 130.

4. Ibid., v. 132.

5. Ibid., vv. 135-6.

6. Ibid., v. 140.

7. *Vi. Pu.*, I, 13. 3f.

8. Sharma, *Political Ideas etc.*, p. 174-5.



*bhāsottamasūtra*, provided a theoretical justification for the title *deva-putra* of the Kuṣāṇas and supported the divine origin of kingship in clear contrast to the earlier social contract theory expounded in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. We may state that a similar change took place in the political views of the brāhmaṇical works also, and the view expressed in the *Arthasāstra*<sup>1</sup> that the first king, Manu Vaivasvata, was elected by people was abandoned in the *Śānti Parva* account. The earlier version of the Pṛthu Vainya story in accord with the contemporary political thesis of the divine ancestry of kingship maintained by the Kuṣāṇas; the later version supports the claims of the Gupta monarchs by identifying the ruling authority with the energy or a portion of Viṣṇu.

Although the divine origin of kingship is set forth even in some passages of the Later Vedic literature<sup>2</sup> and some other texts which are certainly earlier than the Gupta period, these works generally connect the kingship with Prajāpati, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera and several other divinities;<sup>3</sup> definite connection with Viṣṇu is established in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas only, which received their final redaction in the Gupta period. The Purāṇas often speak of kings as partial incarnations of Viṣṇu. It is repeatedly mentioned that the universal emperors are born on the earth in all ages bearing a portion of Viṣṇu<sup>4</sup> in them. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* goes a step further, and in a language which reminds the Buddhist Bodhisattva doctrine states that all kings, that were born and will be born among all classes of beings, are partial embodiments of Viṣṇu; none with the exception of Viṣṇu is capable of protecting the earth.<sup>5</sup> A paramount sovereign bears a mark of Viṣṇu's discus on his hand.<sup>6</sup> Similar sentiments are voiced in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, a work written in the time of Candragupta II. It states that the king endowed with the energy of Viṣṇu and bearing the essence of divinity in his body takes birth in a human form for the protection of the

1. *Aś.*, I. 13.

2. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, pp. 24f.

3. *Rāmā.*, III, 19; 40·12; VII, 76. 31f; *Msm.*, VII, 3-4.

4. *Vā. Pu.*, 57.72; *Brahmāṇḍa Pu.*, II. 29. 78; *Kūrma Purāṇa*, 22. 51.

5. *Vi. Pu.*, I. 22. 16-21.

6. *Ibid.*, I. 13. 46.



people<sup>1</sup>. The doctrine of incarnation also contributed towards the apotheosis of kings and two of the well-known incarnations of Viṣṇu, Rāma Dāśarathi and Kṛṣṇa, were supposed to have been kṣattriya rulers. The principle is repeatedly applied in case of several legendary kings, such as Purañjaya,<sup>2</sup> Bhīmaratha,<sup>3</sup> Pañcajanya,<sup>4</sup> and Māndhātā,<sup>5</sup> who are said to have been endowed with the lustre and form of Viṣṇu. Such statements were evidently meant to popularise the notion that the king was a great divinity, and thus lend support to the pretensions of the Gupta monarchs.

After the fall of the Mauryas, northern India suffered from repeated foreign invasions, and the political situation was very unstable. The texts of the period often refer to anarchical conditions when the laws of family, property and social obligation would not be respected, and the strong would devour the weak without any sense of justice.<sup>6</sup> In such conditions of social and economic turmoil, a king who would offer a strong, stable government and restore the pre-existing social order was given the whole-hearted support of the brāhmaṇas.<sup>7</sup> The Gupta kings enjoyed full backing of the brāhmaṇas and, as they were worshippers of Viṣṇu, the Vaiṣṇavite priests identified them with their chosen deity. Another circumstance which might have influenced the Vaiṣṇavite brāhmaṇas to exalt kingship seems to be that most of the tribal republics flourishing in the early centuries of the Christian era, the Yaudheyas, Audumbaras, Kuṇindas, Kāḍa or Kādravas, Mālavas and Uddehikas, appear to have had pronounced Śaivite leanings. The figures of Kārttikeya and Śiva with a bull appear on the reverse side of the Yaudheya coins;<sup>8</sup> and a Śaiva temple is depicted on the Audumbara coins.<sup>9</sup> The Kuṇinda coins of second-third centuries A.D. bear a figure of Śiva with the legend *bhagavata catreśvara mahātmanah*,<sup>10</sup> and the Kāḍa coins have a

1. *Viṣṇudh.*, II.2.9; I. 172. 35.

2. *Vi. Pu.*, IV. 2.26.

3. *Viṣṇudh.*, I, 74.18.

4. *Hariv.*, I. 15.12.

5. *Vā. Pu.*, 188.69.

6. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, p. 85f.

7. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, III, p. 22f.

8. Allan, BMCCAI, pp. cxlvii-cli ; 265-78 ; 288 ; Altekar, JNSI, XI, p. 50-1 ; Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p.117.

9. S.V. Sohoni, JNSI, IV, pt. 1, p. 55f ; also see JNSI, XXII, p. 44.

10. Banerjea, *op.cit.*, p. 118.



figure of Kārttikeya.<sup>1</sup> A recumbent bull is shown on the coins of the Mālavas;<sup>2</sup> and the Uddehika coins<sup>3</sup> also show the figure of a bull with a tree in railing, similar to that on Ujjayani coins which have the representation of Śiva on the reverse. According to J.N. Banerjea,<sup>4</sup> the bull was recognised as the mount of Śiva as early as the first century B.C. or the first century A.D. These republican states were wiped off by Samudra-gupta and absorbed into the Gupta empire.

The idea that the king is an incarnation of Viṣṇu influenced later rulers also. The early Cālukya kings assumed the title of *śrī-prthivī-vallabha*, the beloved of Śrī and Prthivī, the two wives of Viṣṇu. Perhaps, they claimed their identity with Viṣṇu.<sup>5</sup> At any rate, the Gurjara-Pratihāra king Mihira Bhoja certainly proclaimed his identity with Viṣṇu by assuming the title of *ādivarāha*. His coins depict on the obverse the figure of the Boar with the characteristic four emblems of Viṣṇu, and the legend *śrīmadādivarāha* on the reverse.<sup>6</sup> It is observed<sup>7</sup> that some later rulers of Campā also described themselves as incarnations of Viṣṇu. The title *parama-daivata* was assumed by the king Bhūti-varman of Baḍagaṅgā rock inscription<sup>8</sup>, and a few Vaiṣṇavite kings of the Māṭhara dynasty.<sup>9</sup> In the seventh century A.D. Bāṇa scoffed at the idea of the divinity of the king and called it the work of sycophants. But the idea made a deep impression on Indian minds ; and it is remarked that in a Vaiṣṇava work of early seventeenth century “a Hindu officer of the Moslem court is represented quite naturally addressing his master, an unconsecrated Yavana, as a part of Viṣṇu”.<sup>10</sup>

The coins of Samudra-gupta have a Garuḍa standard on the reverse, which indicates the faith of the monarch.<sup>11</sup> The feature is

1. Allan, BMCCAI, p. xcii.
2. Ibid., p. cv.
3. Ibid., p. cxli ; 240.
4. Banerjea, DHI, II ed., pp. 117 ; 535.
5. D.C. Sircar in *the Classical Age*, p. 228.
6. K.M. Munshi, *The Glory That Was Gurjara-deśa*, pt. I, 1955, p. 123 ; C.D. Chatterjee in *ibid* , pp. 215-6.
7. D.C. Sircar. *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 139.
8. EI, XXX, No. 12, p. 67.
9. For example, Anantaśakti-varman in Andhavaram-plates, EI, XXVIII, No. 3.
10. Ghoshal, IHQ, I, p. 384.
11. Altekar, *Bayana Hoard*, p. liii. f.n.1.



retained on the coinage of the later kings of the dynasty. Several Gupta kings, Candragupta II,<sup>1</sup> Kumāragupta<sup>2</sup> and Skandagupta<sup>3</sup> describe themselves as *parama-bhāgavata*, the great devotee of the *bhagavat*. It is argued<sup>4</sup> that the term is non-sectarian, and that the Gupta kings worshipped Viṣṇu, Śiva, Kārttikeya and other brāhmaṇical divinities with equal devotion. But the sectarian use of the word '*bhāgavata*', in the particular sense of 'the devotee of Viṣṇu', is proved by the *Bṛhat Samhitā* which states<sup>5</sup> that the *bhāgavatas* should be entrusted with the establishment of an image of Viṣṇu, Magas of the Sun, the ash-besmeared *dvijas* of Śambhu, and those who are proficient in the knowledge of the *maṇḍalas* (circles) of Mothers, and so on. The inscriptions of the Maitraka family further illustrate the sectarian use of such titles as *parama-bhāgavata* and *parama-māheśvara*. In the Maliya copper-plates<sup>6</sup> Senāpati Bhaṭārka and his sons Senāpati Dharasena and Senāpati Droṇasiṃha are described as *parama-māheśvara*, but the younger brother of the latter, Mahārāja Dhruvasena, is called a *parama-bhāgavata*, and his younger brother Mahārāja Dharapaṭṭa a *parama āditya-bhakta* (the most devout worshipper of the Sun). Such titles naturally expressed the particular attachment of a person to his tutelary deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*). But, apparently, apart from a little sectarian rivalry exhibited in some legends<sup>7</sup> about Viṣṇu, Śiva and others, there was no basic conflict in the various sects of brāhmaṇism ; for the social basis of these cults remained the same. Gupta Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, both, were based on devotion, brāhmaṇical authority and varṇa rules ; hence although the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas indicated highest regards for their chosen god by adopting titles such as *parama-bhāgavata* and *parama-māheśvara*, they often paid reverence to the other deities of the brāhmaṇical pantheon also. The *parama-bhāgavata* kings Kumāragupta and Skandagupta assumed names of a Śaiva affinity, and on some of the coins of the former, the peacock, the bearer of Kārttikeya, replaced Garuḍa on the reverse in allusion to the name of the king.

1. See the legend on his silver coins, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 275.

2. CII, III, No. 9.

3. CII, III, No. 12, line 23.

4. Dikshitar, *The Gupta Polity*, p. 29 ff.

5. Varāhamihira, *Br. Sam.*, 59.19.

6. CII, III, No. 38.

7. *Mbh.* XII, 330 ; 343.105-130; *Rāmā.*, I. 75.15-20; *Vi. Pu.*, V. 33.



An inscription<sup>1</sup> of A.D. 491 speaks of the construction of a temple of Devī, the consort of Hara (Śiva), by a Mahārāja Gauri whose another inscription,<sup>2</sup> recording the building of a tank, begins with an invocation to Viṣṇu. There was nothing incongruous in the religious devotion of the Maukhari king Ananta-varman, who had images of Kṛṣṇa, Śiva and Durgā installed in the first part of the sixth century A.D.<sup>3</sup> A little later the Gaṅga king Hastivarman Raṇabhīta, who is described as a *parama-māheśvara* and a devotee of the god Gokarṇasvāmin, identified with Śiva, had an image of Nārāyaṇa set up under the name Raṇabhītodaya in reference to his title (biruda).<sup>4</sup> Such worshippers of Viṣṇu, Śiva and others, as paid homage to different divinities and acted in accordance with the smṛti rules of social ethics are described as *smārtas*. In the Gupta period it appears to have been by far the most popular form of Vaiṣṇavism practised by the ruling class, and hence the whole-hearted support of the Vaiṣṇavite priests to their patrons.

In the later portions of the epics and the Purāṇas, the cult of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu is completely united with the varṇa system. In a passage<sup>5</sup> of the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma, who is described as Nārāyaṇa incarnate,<sup>6</sup> cuts off the head of a śūdra ascetic engaged in severe penance, which can be performed only by a brāhmaṇa. As this violation of the varṇa rules caused the death of the son of a brāhmaṇa, Rāma takes prompt action and thus resuscitates the brāhmaṇa youth. His deed is highly applauded by the deities and the sages. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Yama, enumerating the characteristics of a worshipper of Viṣṇu, states that only a person who does not deviate from the path of his varṇa duties should be known as a Vaiṣṇava.<sup>7</sup> There is no other way to please Viṣṇu but to act in accordance with the varṇa rules.<sup>8</sup> The idea is repeated in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*.<sup>9</sup> The *Jayākhyā Saṃhitā*,<sup>10</sup> another work of the

1. EI, XXX, No. 22 ii. lines 1-2.

2. Ibid., i.

3. Infra, p. 187.

4. Infra, pp. 181-82.

5. *Rāmā.*, VII, 73-6.

6. Ibid., VII, 76-29.

7. *Vi. Pu.*, III, 7.20.

8. Ibid., III, 8. 9-12.

9. *Viṣṇudh.*, I, 58. 18.

10. *Jayā. Sam.*, XXII, 28-37.; see Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 204



Gupta period, speaks of four kinds of Vaiṣṇava devotees classified on the basis of their respective degrees of compliance with the varṇa rules. The extent to which the syncretistic cult of Viṣṇu lent support to the varṇa order may be realised from the fact that the Asirgarh copper-seal inscription<sup>1</sup> compares Harivarman, the great-grand-father of Iśānavarman Maukhari who ruled in A.D. 554, with Viṣṇu, the wielder of discus, in using his sovereignty for the establishment of the *varṇāśrama* system. Several rulers of the Gupta period proclaim themselves as upholders of the brāhmaṇical social discipline. The inscriptions<sup>2</sup> of the *parama-bhāgavata* king Mahārāja Samkṣobha describe him as one who is intent upon establishing the rules of varṇa and stages of life. The description appears to have become conventional in later inscriptions,<sup>3</sup> but the fact that the Purāṇic chapters dealing with varṇa rules were mostly written in a period between the third and the fifth centuries A.D.<sup>4</sup> clearly shows that the movement, which received full support from the ruling class, had its roots in the social conditions of the time. We may note the evidence of the Mandasor inscription of Yaśodharmana dated in A.D. 532. It speaks of a *rājasthānīya* Abhayadatta as one who, like the priest of the gods, protected by his official functions the territory to the advantages of the varṇas, that is, the recognised four varṇas.<sup>5</sup> His nephew and successor to his office, Dharmadoṣa, also is described as having stopped the intermixture of castes.<sup>6</sup>

However, unlike the earlier Vedic ritual of sacrifices, Vaiṣṇavism not only safeguarded the interests of the priestly and the ruling classes but also catered to the needs of the lower varṇas by allowing them to worship Viṣṇu with the rituals prescribed for them. It did no damage to any religious belief or superstition but merely assimilated and fitted it into a brāhmaṇical framework without creating any antagonism: thus it could successfully brāhmaṇise the numerous tribal and local cults and become popular among all classes and varṇas.

1. *varṇāśrama-vyavasthāpana-pravṛtta-cakkrāś-cakradhara iva*. CII, III, No. 47, lines 1-2.

2. Ibid., No. 25, line 10; and EI, VIII, No. 28, line 11.

3. Cf. CII, III, No. 52, lines 5-6; No. 39, lines 43-4.

4. Hazra, *Pu. Rec.*, p. 174.

5. *aneka-deśām rājasthānīya-vṛtṭyā suragururiva yo varṇinām bhutaye'pāt*. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 390.; also see the tr. of Fleet, CII, III, p. 157,

6. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 390-1; lines 17-8 of the ins.



We have already discussed several pieces of evidence indicating its popularity among the ruling class; many feudatories and kings of A.D. 400-600 were Vaiṣṇavites by faith. Among the brāhmaṇas, apart from the numerous anonymous priests who produced the vast mass of Vaiṣṇavite literature—all that remains to show their devotion to Viṣṇu—a few inscriptions also refer to the brāhmaṇa worshippers of Viṣṇu. An inscription<sup>1</sup> of the second century A.D., now preserved in the Peshawar Museum, speaks of a brāhmaṇa Vāsudeva, whose name betrays the influence of Bhāgavatism. We have referred<sup>2</sup> to Ācārya Yaśastrāta, a highly esteemed Sattvata of the Gotama gotra, his son Viṣṇutrāta and the great-grandson Somatrāta, who were all devout worshippers of Viṣṇu. An inscription<sup>3</sup> of A.D. 484 refers to a feudatory king Mātr-viṣṇu, a brāhmaṇa of the Maitrāyaṇīya Śākhā, who dedicated a flagstaff to god Janārdana (Viṣṇu). The names of the other members of his family, Indra-viṣṇu, Varuṇa-viṣṇu and Dhanya-viṣṇu, also exhibit Vaiṣṇavite influence.

Among the members of the lower varṇas also Vaiṣṇavism appears to have made good progress. An inscription of A.D. 424 records the erection of a temple on the footprint of Viṣṇu by three bania (vaiśya) brothers.<sup>4</sup> Another inscription of the time of Budhagupta marks the construction of the two temples of the gods Kokā-mukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin by a rich banker Ṛbhupāla.<sup>5</sup> The Baigram copper-plate inscription of A.D. 448 refers to the dedication of some land by Bhoyila and Bhāskara, two *kuṭumbins*, to a temple of Govindasvāmin founded by their father Śivanandin.<sup>6</sup> The word *kuṭumbin* is translated as a husbandman or agriculturist.<sup>7</sup> A fourth or fifth century Bhitā seal, bearing the name of the banker Jayavasuda, has on it a figure of tortoise which might refer to the Kūrma incarnation of Viṣṇu.<sup>8</sup> The Basārḥ seals suggest that Vaiṣṇavism was popular with artisans also. Two of the seals contain the names *kulika* (craftsman) Hari and *kulika* Kṛṣṇadatta.<sup>9</sup> The

1. CII, II, pt.i. No. 81.

2. Supra, p. 135.

3. CII, III No. 19.

4. D.R. Bhandarkar, MASI, No. 4, pp. 120-1.

5. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p.32 8f.

6. EI, XXI, No. 13.

7. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 343 f.n.4. ; EI, XXXIII, p. 307. f.n.4.

8. Marshal, ASIAR, 1911-12 p. 48.

9. Bloch, ASIAR, 1903-4, p.115. Seal No. 77 ; 78. ; also see K.G. Gosawami, *A Study of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 38.



*Vāyu Purāṇa* states that brāhmaṇas, kṣattriyas and vaiśyas of the city of Champāvatī were the worshippers of Viṣṇu.<sup>1</sup> Nothing is said about the fourth varṇa. Nor can we produce any epigraphic evidence of the influence of Vaiṣṇavism among the śūdras for they were socially too insignificant to be mentioned in these records. However, the *Uttarādhyayana sūtra*<sup>2</sup> speaks of a sovāga (śvapāka) Harisena who preached to a brāhmaṇa the importance of penance, celibacy, abstinence, right-exertion and similar Jaina teachings. The cāṇḍāla may have been a Jaina, but his name, meaning one who has Hari (Nārāyaṇa) as his lord, suggests Vaiṣṇavite influence. Further, the fact that the Vaiṣṇavite texts repeatedly stress that even the śūdras could attain emancipation by worshipping Viṣṇu clearly shows that the worship of Viṣṇu was prevalent among the people of the fourth varṇa also. A Pañcarātra work allows the members of the śūdra caste to make images for worship.<sup>3</sup> Thus in the Gupta period Vaiṣṇavism was accepted by the members of all classes and varṇas. An idea of the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism may be gained from an analysis of the names mentioned in the Sultanpur copper-plate inscription<sup>4</sup> of A.D. 440. Out of the total of ninety names, twenty-two have Vaiṣṇavite and nineteen Śaivite affinities.<sup>5</sup> The list contains the names of a few *kāyasthas* (scribes), *pūstapālas* (record-keepers), the brāhmaṇa donees, and a good number of the leading men and householders or agriculturists of the *vīthī*.

The reason of the unprecedented popularity of Vaiṣṇavism lies in the fact that the cult could best realise the requirements of the age. In preaching the principle of devotion Vaiṣṇavism was in tune with the social outlook of the times, when the feudatories considered themselves to be subsisting on the feet of their masters (*pādopajīvin*)<sup>6</sup> It also fulfilled the needs of all sections of people. The kings could strengthen their power by posing as the incarnations of Viṣṇu; the rich could earn religious merit by building temples and images; and the poor could hope to improve their condition in the next

1. *Vā. Pu.*, 99. 105-7.

2. *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, XII ff.

3. Sharma, *Śū. Anc. Ind.*, p. 270.

4. EI, XXXI, No. 9.

5. Appendix C.

6. Guṇaighar copper-plate ins. of Vainya-gupta, line 2; Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 331, CII, III, No. 5 line 3.



birth by simple devotion and faithful discharge of social obligations imposed upon them by a brāhmaṇical society. The cult countenanced all kinds of religious beliefs and superstitions and encouraged faith instead of logic and reasoning. Thus it acted as a powerful instrument for reconciling the masses to their lot and helped in stabilising the social divisions based on the self-sufficient agricultural economy of villages.

### *Regional Extent of Vaiṣṇavism*

The composite character of early Vaiṣṇavism discussed in the foregoing chapters makes it quite plain that the history of Vaiṣṇavism in the centuries just before and after the commencement of the Christian era is more properly the history of different cult-divinities which were gradually being drawn into the vortex of neo-Vaiṣṇavism. To realise the regional extent of this religion we must study the areas where the worship of these deities was prevalent.

Analysing the contents of the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Śānti-Parva*, Grierson<sup>1</sup> remarked that the worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa arose among the Yādavas who lived “to the south of the Madhyadeśa in the north of what is now Gujarāt and Rājputāna.” A similar view was expressed by R.P. Chanda.<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of Raychaudhuri<sup>3</sup> the Jamna valley was the original home of this cult. Megasthenes connected Herakles, that is, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, with the Śūrasenas living in Methora (Mathura) and Kleisobora (Kṛṣṇapura?) through whose territory flowed a navigable river Iobores.<sup>4</sup> Iobores is identified with modern Jamna, and it seems that in the fourth century B.C. the worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa was popular in the Mathura region.

### *I. Vaiṣṇavism in the Śuṅga Period.*

The earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of the Bhāgavata cult is found in Madhya Pradesh. The discovery of the Garuḍa-pillar inscription of Besnagar is a landmark in the history of Bhāgavatism. The inscription<sup>5</sup> records the erection of a Garuḍa standard in the honour of Vāsudeva, the god of gods, by a Greek

1. Grierson, *IA*, 1908, p. 252.

2. Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races*, Part I, p. 101.

3. Raychaudhuri, *EHVS*, p. 95; 72.

4. *Supra*, p. 75.

5. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 90-1.



ambassador Heliodorus who describes himself as a Bhāgavata, and a resident of Takṣaśilā. The ambassador came from the Greek king Antialcidas to Kautsīputra Bhāgabhadra identified with the fifth Śuṅga king, and the record is dated in the fourteenth year of his reign approximating to c. 113 B.C.<sup>1</sup> R.P. Chanda suggested<sup>2</sup> that Heliodorus might have adopted Bhāgavatism after coming to Vidiśā or even before he left Taxila; if the latter alternative is accepted it will prove the prevalence of Bhāgavatism in Punjab in the second half of the second century B.C. In any case, Besnagar appears to have been an important seat of Bhāgavatism, and the shaft of another Garuḍa column discovered at Besnagar bears an inscription recording the setting up of the Garuḍa column of the excellent temple of the *bhagavat* by Bhāgavata, son of Gautamī, in the twelfth regnal year of king Bhāgavata, the ninth Śuṅga king.<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes presumed<sup>4</sup> that the dedicator was the king himself, although the mutilated condition of the record does not warrant any such supposition. The remains<sup>5</sup> at Besnagar have also yielded a palm and a fish-capital, and it is argued<sup>6</sup> that these indicate the existence of the shrines of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Pradyumna in the same locality. Although the former contention is quite justified, for the association of Saṅkarṣaṇa with fan-palm is an ancient feature, we have nothing to show that as early as the second century B.C., the probable date of these sculptures, Pradyumna was identified with Kāmadeva whose ensignia is fish (*makara*). An image of Śrī also was discovered among these ruins, and we know that she came to be associated with Viṣṇu only much later.<sup>7</sup> However, two bas-reliefs at Bhārhut datable in the second century B.C. further attest to the popularity of the cult in this region. The reliefs<sup>8</sup> depict a male and a female on horseback carrying two Garuḍa banners, and the riders are shown behind a royal figure who is identified with

1. Sircar, AIU, p. 116.

2. Chanda, MASI, No. 5, p. 157.

3. D.R. Bhandarkar, ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 190f.

4. Pusalker, *Studies in the Epics and the Purāṇas*, p. 53; Baladeva Upadhyaya, *Bhāgavata Sampradāya*, p. 92.

5. ASIAR, 1913-14, pp. 188-91; Ibid., 1914-15, p. 21f.

6. Chanda, MASI, No. 5, p. 163; Banerjea, DHI, I ed, pp. 114-5.

7. Supra, p. 100.

8. ASIAR, 1924-25, p. 128.



king Revatīmitra of Vidiśā.<sup>1</sup> It is argued<sup>2</sup> that the king must have been a Bhāgavata. Towards the north, a stone-pillar capital shaped like a cluster of palmyra leaves was discovered at Pawaya near Gwalior.<sup>3</sup> The capital is assigned to the first century B.C. and is an indication of the popularity of Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa worship.

A few years back a four-handed stone statue, bearing a Prākṛta inscription engraved in the Brāhmī script of the first century B.C., has been discovered at Burhikhar near Malhar in the Bilaspur district of the Madhya Pradesh.<sup>4</sup> The image holds a discus (*cakra*) in the upper left hand, and the top of a mace (*gadā*) by the upper right; and the two lower hands are folded in the attitude of paying homage (in the *añjali* pose). This shows that the image occupied a subordinate place in the shrine of some principal deity. D.C. Sircar and J. N. Banerjea<sup>5</sup> are of the view that it is not an image of Viṣṇu but of some *parivāra-devatā* of that god installed in a Vaiṣṇava temple. But, in our opinion there is nothing to show that the image occupied a Vaiṣṇava shrine. As the attributes undoubtedly prove, it is an image of Vāsudeva; and we have pointed out earlier<sup>6</sup> that the Jainas also dedicated images of Vāsudeva to their religious establishments. The popular deities, Yakṣa, Kubera and Śrī-Lakṣmī, figure in the Buddhist Bhārhut sculptures; and, very probably, this image of the popular god Vāsudeva also was set up for the glorification of some greater deity, Jaina, Buddhist or Brāhmaṇical. Malhar is well-known for the Brāhmaṇical as well as Buddhist and Jaina ruins.

The earliest indication of the prevalence of Bhāgavatism in Rājputāna is given by the Ghoṣuṇḍi inscription.<sup>7</sup> It speaks of the construction of an enclosing stone-wall round the place of worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva in the Nārāyaṇa-Vāṭikā by the

1. Kunja Govinda Gosvami, *A study of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 7.

2. Ibid.

3. ASIAR, 1914-15, pt. I, p. 21; pl. XV I C.

4. D.C. Sircar, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Waltair, 1953, pp. 39f; *Journal of the Mythic Society*. Bangalore, Culture and Heritage Number, 1956, pp. 221f. In the *Ind. Arch.*, 1960 61, p. 59, the back right hand of the image is described as holding a conch, but this is evidently a mistake.

5. J.N. Banerjea in AIU, p. 452, f.n.2.

6. Supra, p. 86-7.

7. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 91-2.



Bhāgavata king Sarvatāta. Sarvatāta is taken to be a Kāṇva king,<sup>1</sup> and the inscription is ascribed to the latter half of the first century B.C.<sup>2</sup> Ghoṣuṇḍi is near Nagari, which is eight miles north of Chitorgarh in Rājasthān, and archaeological excavations have brought to light a rectangular stone enclosure at a place known as Hāthībādā. The site contains walls nearly ten feet high, and appears to have been the place of worship mentioned in the inscription. It is evident that Nagari, identified with the ancient city of Mādhyamikā,<sup>3</sup> contained shrines not only of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vasudeva but also of Nārāyaṇa after whom the site was named.

In the Western Deccan, the prevalence of Bhāgavatism is shown by the Nānāghaṭ cave inscription of queen Nāyanikā. It begins with an invocation to Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva and several other divinities.<sup>4</sup> Palaeographically the record is assigned to the second half of the first century B.C., a little before the Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravela.<sup>5</sup>

The epigraphic evidence for the regional extent of Bhāgavatism in the Śuṅga period is not much; but numismatics and iconography are of some help to us. A stone idol of the deity Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa assignable to the second century B.C., has been discovered at Mathura,<sup>6</sup> and on the coins of some tribal kings of Mathura occur names such as Viṣṇumitra, Rāmadatta and Śeṣadatta, showing Vaiṣṇavite influence. However, only the first mentioned ruler is placed in the first century B.C., the last two were perhaps vassals of the Kuṣāṇas and flourished in the second century A.D.<sup>7</sup> A coin of Viṣṇumitra of Pāñcāla series bears a two-armed figure of Viṣṇu according to Allan;<sup>8</sup> but Banerjea thinks it to be four-armed.<sup>9</sup> The coin should, perhaps, be ascribed to the first century A.D.<sup>10</sup>

1. Supra.

2. Sircar, loc. cit.

3. ASIAR, 1934-35, p. 55.

4. Sircar, op. cit., pp. 186-90, line 1 of the ins.; supra, p. 73.

5. Ibid., p. 186, f.n. 1.

6. Supra, p. 59.

7. Sircar, AIU, p. 171, for the dates.

8. Allan, BMCCAI, p. cxix.

9. Banerjea, DHI, I ed., p. 143.

10. Sircar remarks that the Ahicchatra coins are to be dated in the three centuries following the middle of the first century B.C. Viṣṇumitra is placed eighth in the list of the Ahicchatra kings, so it is to be assigned to the first century A.D. AIU, p. 172.



On a few of the earliest coins of the Audumbara republic Allan read the legend in Kharoṣṭhī on the obverse and Brāhmī on the reverse as *bhāgavata mahādevasya rājarājñah* and interpreted it as 'of Mahādeva, the worshipper of the *bhagavat* the king of kings.'<sup>1</sup> On this basis, it is contended<sup>2</sup> that a Mahādeva of the Audumbara family was a devotee of the *bhagavat* or Viṣṇu, and as such the influence of Vaiṣṇavism in the first century B.C., the date of these coins,<sup>3</sup> extended to the valley of the Beas in the modern districts of Kangra, Gurudaspur, and Hoshiarpur. But D.C. Sircar<sup>4</sup> has corrected the reading as *bhagavato mahādevasya rājarājasya*, 'of the god Mahādeva, the king of kings'. In his opinion these coins were issued in the name of the god Mahādeva or Śiva who was apparently the family deity of the Audumbaras. On the coins of early Audumbara rulers, Śivadāsa, Rudradāsa and Dharaghoṣa the word *mahādevasya* is added before the name of the ruler of the Audumbara tribe, and Allan thought that Mahādeva was the regal title of these rulers.<sup>5</sup> But the legends, interpreted as "of the king so-and so, the Audumbari; of (the god) Mahādeva", merely indicate that the coins were issued both in the name of the divine and the temporal head. We have referred to the representation of a Śaiva temple on the Audumbara coins:<sup>6</sup> there is no doubt that the reading given by D.C. Sircar is the correct one. Allan's rendering of a Yaudheya coin legend<sup>7</sup> as *bhāgavata svāmino brahmaṇya devasya kumārasya* has been corrected by J.N. Banerjea as *bhagavataḥ* (or *to*) *svāmino brahmaṇya devasya kumārasya*.<sup>8</sup> Similarly the legend on Kuṇinda coins read by Allan as *bhāgavata chatreśvara mahātmanah* is given by J.N. Banerjea as *bhagavata chatreśvara mahātmanah*.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it appears that during the four centuries following the end of the Śunga rule the tribal republics of Western and Central India were predominantly

1. Allan, op.cit, p. xxxv ; 123.

2. K.G. Gosvami, op. cit., p. 9.

3. D.C. Sircar assigns these coins to a period between the last quarter of the first century B.C. and the first half of the first century A.D. Sircar, AIU, pp. 161-2, f.n.

4. Ibid.

5. Allan, op. cit., pp. lxxxiii-iv.

6. Supra, p. 163.

7. Allan, op. cit., p. 270.

8. Banerjea, JNSI, XIII, pp. 161-3.

9. Banerjea, DHI, II ed, p. 118.



Śaivite; the influence of Bhāgavatism during the 2nd-1st centuries B.C. appears to have been confined to some areas of Uttar Pradesh, Rājasthān, Madhya Pradesh and portions of Mahārāṣṭra.

## II. *The progress of Bhāgavatism in the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa period.*

(From the beginning of the Christian era to A.D. 300)

Although not many epigraphs deal with Bhāgavatism in the period between the first and the third centuries A.D. iconographical findings of the period supplement our knowledge to some extent.

Mathura appears to have been a principal seat of Bhāgavatism during the rule of the Śaka satraps. The Mora inscription<sup>1</sup> of the time of Śoḍāsa, the son of Mahākṣatrapa Rañjuvula (A.D. 1-15), recording the installation of the images of the five Vṛṣṇi hero-gods, bears witness to this fact. Another inscription<sup>2</sup> of a slightly later date, records the erection of a shrine, an arched gateway (*torāṇa*) and a railed platform or balcony (*vedikā*) at the sacred place of *bhagavat* Vāsudeva by a certain person named Vasu (or one who had a name-ending in *vasu*). It ends with a benedictory prayer for the increase of the rule of Mahākṣatrapa Śoḍāsa. From these two inscriptions it is obvious that at least two, if not more, temples of *bhagavat* Vāsudeva existed in the vicinity of Mathura in the time of Śoḍāsa.

A good number of icons and sculptural representations dealing with Vaiṣṇavite themes and datable in the Kuṣāṇa period have been discovered in the vicinity of Mathura. A piece of sculpture<sup>3</sup> found near the Mathura city depicts Vāsudeva wading through the waters carrying the child-Kṛṣṇa to Gokula. This is the earliest sculpture portraying a scene from the life of Kṛṣṇa and is assigned to the first century A.D. on grounds of style. A relief<sup>4</sup> in mottled red sandstone showing Kṛṣṇa standing with the Mt. Govardhana balanced on the palm of his upraised left hand was dated by Coomaraswamy<sup>5</sup> and J. N. Banerjea<sup>6</sup> in the late Kuṣāṇa period ;

1. EI, XXIV, No. 27, i.

2. JBRS, XXXIX, 1953, p. 45f.

3. D.R. Sahni, ASIAR, 1925-26, pp. 183-4, pl. LXVII fig. c.; Agrawala, *Cat. Br. Im. Ma. Art*, p. 42; Banerjea, JISOA, XIV, p. 18; *supra*, p. 83.

4. No. D. 47 in Mathura Museum collection.

5. Coomaraswamy, HIIA, p. 66. pl. XXIX, fig. 102.

6. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, p. 69.



but according to Agrawala<sup>1</sup> it is not earlier than the seventh century A.D.

In his *Catalogue of the Brāhmaṇical Images in Mathura Art* V.S. Agrawala enumerates as many as fourteen images of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu ascribed by him to the Kuṣāṇa period.<sup>2</sup> He writes that Viṣṇu images in their earliest form are exactly like those of Bodhisattva Maitreya with the addition of two extra arms. "Distinctive features gradually appeared in respect of each god and goddess in their plastic forms".<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest images of Viṣṇu in Mathura art holds the right hand in *abhaya mudrā* (a pose of the hand offering protection to the devotee) and a nectar-pot in the left hand, like the images of the Bodhisattva Maitreya ; of the two extra arms, the back left hand is shown holding a discus and the back right a mace.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, it shows the transition from a Buddhist to a Brāhmaṇical image",<sup>5</sup> and the view is accepted by J.N. Banerjea.<sup>6</sup> Agrawala considers the image No. 933 catalogued by him as the best example of the Maitreya type of Viṣṇu, and he points out that Viṣṇu images of a little later date are shown holding the discus, mace and conch, with the fourth hand in the *abhaya mudrā*.<sup>7</sup> Lotus as a distinct symbol of Viṣṇu was last to be evolved.<sup>8</sup> Only one statuette,<sup>9</sup> ascribable to the Kuṣāṇa period, represents the deity for the first time with all the four well-known attributes.

Viṣṇu figures with four or more hands are well-known from the Gupta period onwards. However, K.D. Bajpai has noticed two eight-handed images<sup>10</sup> which, in his opinion, should be placed in the late Kuṣāṇa period. One of these was recovered from a well in the village Pālikherā of Mathura district. The icon is made of spotted red sandstone and holds a stone (*giri*), a sword (*asi*), arrows (*iṣu*) and

1. Agrawala, op. cit. p. 18.

2. Ibid., p. 4f.

3. Ibid., p. vii.

4. Ibid., No. 912.

5. Agrawala, JISOA, V, p. 124.

6. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, p. 69.

7. Agrawala, op. cit., p. vii, No. 956.

8. Supra, p. 103.

. Agrawala, op. cit., No. 1168.

10 K.D. Bajpai, *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1951, pp. 78-9; the statues are numbered in the Mathura museum as 1010 and 3550 respectively.



perhaps a discus (*cakra*) in the four right hands ; the left ones are broken. The other image has only one extant hand which holds a conch and is preserved in the Mathura Museum.

Besides the images of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu, two of Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa also were recovered from the Mathura region. A two-armed male figure with a snake canopy overhead, holding a cup in the left hand and wearing a vaijayantī garland, was obtained from the Dīrgha Viṣṇu temple in Mathura city.<sup>1</sup> It shows on the left a staff surmounted by a tailed lion and on the right a pestle, which gives out its identity. The image is ascribed to the Kuṣāṇa age. Another Kuṣāṇa statue of Baladeva was obtained from village Girdharpur.<sup>2</sup> The distinctive emblem, the pestle, is carved on the right side and a staff-like object, probably a mace (*gadā*), is shown on the left.

The pieces of evidence adduced so far make it sufficiently clear that the worship of Vāsudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa continued unabated in the Mathura region, and the view of Raychaudhuri<sup>3</sup> that Mathura had ceased to be the stronghold of Bhāgavatism during the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa rule has now to be abandoned. In fact, it was the popularity of Vāsudeva and Baladeva legends in the Mathura region which led Jainism to incorporate them in its pantheon, and we find a Jaina devotee dedicating an image of the Vāsudevas<sup>4</sup> in A.D. 113.

In Rājasthān, an inscription<sup>5</sup> of A.D. 279 found on a sacrificial pillar in Barnālā in the old Jaipur state marks the performance of five *trirātra* sacrifices and expresses the wish that the god Viṣṇu may be pleased. This seems to be more in line with the Vedic worship of Viṣṇu connected with Vedic sacrifices than with Purāṇic Vaiṣṇavism. However, another Yūpa inscription<sup>6</sup> of the third century A.D., found at Nāndsā in the Sahārā district of the former Udaipur state, indicates a comingling of both the Vedic and the Purāṇic forms of Viṣṇu worship ; it records the performance of Vedic sacrifices after building the shrines of Brahmā, Indra, Prajāpati and Viṣṇu.

1. Ibid., p. 23, No. c. 19.

2. Ibid., No. 1325.

3. Raychaudhuri, EHVS, p. 163.

4. Supra, p. 86-7.

5. EI, XXVI, No. 12. B.

6. IA, LVIII, 1929, p. 53; EI, XXVII, No. 43, V.S. Pathak, JNSI, XX, 1958, p. 199.



We have some traces of the prevalence of the cult in the north-west also. A Peshawar Museum stone inscription speaks of a Brāhmaṇa Vāsudeva, son of Indradeva, a resident of Obhara.<sup>1</sup> The name of the former may suggest that the influence of Bhāgavatism extended to the northern portions of the Punjab in the second century A.D., for although the exact find-spot is not known the inscription must have been acquired from some neighbouring place. In Himachal Pradesh, on a rock situated behind the famous temple Raghunātha in the village Devaprayāga occurs a name, Caturvyūha, inscribed in Brāhmī.<sup>2</sup> The characters of the script may be attributed to some time between the second and the fifth centuries A.D. However, Caturvyūha, a name of Viṣṇu in reference to his four vyūha forms, might have been the name of some pilgrim who came to visit the place from some other locality.

In the south, Sātavāhanas, who encouraged the Mahāsāṅghikas and supported the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism,<sup>3</sup> were also favourably disposed towards the Vaiṣṇavite cults, and names such as Kṛṣṇa<sup>4</sup> and Viṣṇupālita<sup>5</sup> (one protected by Viṣṇu) are not uncommon among them. An inscription of Gautamīputra Yajñaśrī, who is supposed to have ruled from c. A.D. 174 to 203,<sup>6</sup> begins with an invocation to *bhagavat* Vāsudeva.<sup>7</sup> The inscription is dated in the twenty-seventh year of his reign and was discovered in the village Chinna in the Krishna district of the Andhra Pradesh.

In the inscriptions found at Nāsik, Kanheri, Koṇḍane and other rock-cut caves of Western India, Amarāvātī and Nāgarjunikoṇḍa, names showing Vaiṣṇavite affinities appear to have been quite popular with the Buddhist devotees and officers of the Sātavāhana kingdom. A Nāsik cave inscription<sup>8</sup> of the time of Gautamī-

1. No. 21, see CII. II, pt. i, No. 81, pl. xxx. 1.

2. EI, XXX, No. 23 Ins. No. xviii.

3. EI, VIII, No. 8, Nāsik cave inscriptions Nos. 2; 4; 22 *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II, p. 377.

4. EI, VIII, No. 8, Nāsik cave ins. No. 4 line 1.

5. Mahād Buddhist cave ins., Luders List, No. 1072.

6. D.C. Sircar, AIU, p. 205.

7. The inscription was edited by Buhler in EI, I. (No. 15, pp. 95-6), but the missing three syllables *vā su de* after *bhagavato* were supplied by N.G. Majumdar. See Raychaudhuri, op. cit., p. 163.

8. EI, VIII, No. 8, Nāsik cave inscription No. 4.



putra Sātakarṇi (c. A.D. 106-30) speaks of Viṣṇupālita, officer in charge of Govardhana, a place south west of Mt. Triraśmi in the Nāsik district of Mahārāṣṭra. Another Nāsik cave inscription of the time of Vāsiṣṭhīputra Puṣumāvi (c. A.D. 130-59) refers to an officer, Viṣṇupāla.<sup>1</sup> A Bhājā Buddhist cistern inscription mentions a Mahārathi Viṣṇudatta the son of Kauśikī<sup>2</sup> and at Nāgarjunicoṇḍa a Mahāsenāpati Mahātalavara Vinhusiri (Skt. Viṣṇuśrī) of the Pūkiya family is referred to in the Āyaka pillar inscription.<sup>3</sup> We have referred to Śaka Viṣṇudatta of Daśapura (identified with Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh) and a Śaka woman Viṣṇudattā, wife of Gaṇapaka Rebhila and mother of Gaṇapaka Viśvavarmma in the Nāsik cave inscriptions;<sup>4</sup> a merchant Viṣṇunandin is mentioned in a Kānheri cave inscription<sup>5</sup> of the time of rājan Māṭharīputra Svāmi Śakasena. Viṣṇunandin is said to be an inhabitant of Kalyāṇa, modern Kalyan in the Thana district of Mahārāṣṭra. Names such as Rāmadatta,<sup>6</sup> Kanha (Kṛṣṇa),<sup>7</sup> Viṣṇukā<sup>8</sup> and Venhū<sup>9</sup> (Viṣṇu in the female gender) frequently appear at Amarāvati, Kuḍā and Koṇḍane cave inscriptions. Thus, although the direct epigraphic reference to Vaiṣṇavism is very meagre during the period under review, the evidence of the Buddhist records may justify our conclusion that Vaiṣṇavism was well in progress not only in the north but also in the south, particularly in the Deccan in the first three centuries of the Christian era. It finds full corroboration in the literary works of the period, and it is pointed<sup>10</sup> out that some early Śaṅgam works such as *Padiṟruppattu*, *Perumbāṇāṟruppaḍai* and *Puṟaṇānūru* contain many references to the worship of Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa.

1. Ibid., No. 3.

2. Luders List, No. 1079.

3. EI, XX, No. 1. The Āyaka pillar inscription c. 5, pp. 20-1.

4. Supra, p. 211.

5. Luders' List, No. 1001 ; also see No. 1002.

6. Ibid., No. 1058.

7. Ibid., No. 1071, also see Nos. 1214; 1252; 1287; and 1291.

8. Kuḍā., Buddhist cave ins., Burgess and Bhagawanlal Indraji, *The Cave Temples of Western India*, p. 18, ins. No. 24; Luders' List, No. 1061.

9. Amarāvati Buddhist rail ins., Luders' List, No. 1216.

10. Nilakanta Sastri in *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. II, pp. 562; 565-6. Also see S.K. Aiyangar, *Pro. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, third session, 1939, p. 83.



### III. Vaiṣṇavism in the Gupta Period.

The patronage of the Gupta monarchs, the support of the priestly class, and the adoption of a syncretistic, tolerant attitude, all these things combined, led to an unprecedented increase in the popularity and prestige of Vaiṣṇavism in the Gupta period, and our sources indicate that the cult spread not only throughout the country but also in the Indian colonies of Java and Bali.

A rock inscription<sup>1</sup> found in the village Tuśām of the Hissar district, Haryana, begins with an invocation to god Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu and records the dedication of a house-shrine and two reservoirs to the *bhagavat* by a certain Ācārya Somatrāta, the great-grandson of Ācārya Yaśastrāta, who is described as a great devotee of the *bhagavat*.<sup>2</sup> The name of Somatrāta's grandfather, Viṣṇutrāta, also exhibits Vaiṣṇavite influence. The inscription, which is palaeographically assigned to the fifth century A.D.,<sup>3</sup> discloses the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism with four successive generations in a family at Hissar, and we may infer that the cult must have prevailed in the region at least as early as the fourth century A.D. Some terracotta sealings<sup>4</sup> discovered at Sunet in the Ludhiana district contain such personal names as Śaṅkara-Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇudāsa. These are ascribable to the fifth century A.D., and once again illustrate the popularity of the brāhmaṇical cults in the Punjab state.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Bhitari stone pillar inscription is an important epigraph recording the installation of an icon of Viṣṇu under the name Śārṅgin, the bearer of the bow, by king Skanda-gupta.<sup>5</sup> Bhitari is a village in the Ghazipur district, and the red sandstone pillar bearing the inscription stands just outside it, in the southern direction. The village was allotted for the worship of the image which was apparently established in the same locality. Another stone inscription<sup>6</sup> of A.D. 468, discovered in the pavement of the Daśāvatāra temple at Gaḍhavā in the Allahabad district, records the installation of an image of Anantasvāmin, evidently Viṣṇu in his Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa form. It also speaks of the god Citrakūṭasvāmin, the lord

1. CII, III, No. 67.

2. Ibid., lines 3-4.

3. Fleet, *ibid.*, p. 270.

4. *Anc. Ind.*, No. 5, p. 58.

5. CII, III, No. 13, lines 17-19.

6. Ibid., No. 66.



of Citrakūṭa, who could be no other than Rāma, son of Daśaratha. Citrakūṭa is identified with modern Chatarkot in the Banda district of U.P., and is 71 miles from Allahabad. It is a well-known place for pilgrimage, and is considered highly sacred for Rāma-worship. A little later, the Jaunpur stone inscription<sup>1</sup> of Íśvara-varman Maukhari makes a reference to Viṣṇu as the god who is self-born (*ātma-bhū*) and wields the bow with his arms. Íśvara-varman was a feudatory of the Guptas in the first half of the sixth century A.D.

Besides the inscriptions discovered in U.P. a large number of seals found at Bhitā<sup>2</sup> in Allahabad also provides valuable information for a study of Vaiṣṇavism. Although all the seals might not have originated at Bhitā itself, some of these were apparently attached to letters sent from different localities, and some others were used as tokens, passports etc., a good number of these might have belonged to places nearabout, and the religious sealings were perhaps used as votive tablets. One of these<sup>3</sup> bears the legend *namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*, 'salutation to lord Vāsudeva,' along with a wheel like symbol. As Marshall points out,<sup>4</sup> there must have been a temple of Vāsudeva at Bhitā in the Gupta period. Another seal<sup>5</sup> bears the figure of a male identified with Viṣṇu. Four of the seals<sup>6</sup> have a representation of Śrī-Lakṣmī on them, one of which speaks of a Mahāśvapati-Mahādaṇḍanāyaka Viṣṇurakṣita (literally, one protected by Viṣṇu) in eastern Gupta characters.<sup>7</sup> Viṣṇurakṣita is supposed to have been associated with the kings of Kauśāmbī.<sup>8</sup> Two others seem to depict the Tortoise and the Duck incarnations of Viṣṇu.<sup>9</sup> Out of the 120 seals catalogued by Marshall, only a few belong to Buddhism and the Sun-cult, the majority show Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite affinities. However, it is worth noting that although as many as eight seals and sealings<sup>10</sup> indicating Śaivite influence have been attributed to the Kuṣāṇa period, not one of the Vaiṣṇavite seals can be

1. CII, III, No. 51.

2. Marshall's excavations at Bhitā, ASIAR, 1911-12, p. 47f.

3. Ibid., Sealing No. 21.

4. Marshall, ASIAR, 1911-12, p. 50; Banerjea, DHI, II ed., p. 192.

5. Marshall, op. cit., Sealing No. 22, Banerjea, op. cit.

6. Marshall, op. cit., Sealing Nos. 32; 34; 35; and 42.

7. Ibid., Sealing No. 32.

8. D.C. Sircar, AIU, p. 177.

9. Marshall, op. cit. Nos. 2 and 53 respectively.

10. Ibid., Nos. 10, 12 (?), 19, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.



placed so early;<sup>1</sup> apparently the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism was much augmented during the Gupta rule. An analysis of the symbols and legends occurring on the Bhiṭā seals and sealings shows that 21 of these,<sup>2</sup> ascribable to the Gupta period, suggest Vaiṣṇavite associations, 26 Śaivite,<sup>3</sup> and 6 of the Sun-cult;<sup>4</sup> the few Buddhist ones are assigned to the sixth century or later. Thus both the major brāhmaṇical cults, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, were in a flourishing condition in the region around Bhiṭā in Uttar Pradesh.

The discovery of a large number of Vaiṣṇavite sculptures of the Gupta period further illustrates the popularity of the cult; and many of these<sup>5</sup> have been found in the Mathura region. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>6</sup> refers to an image of Viṣṇu established at Mathura; and there is no doubt that the place must have had several Vaiṣṇavite shrines. The earliest extant icons of Viṣṇu's incarnations, the Boar, Man-Lion and the Dwarf, are assigned to the Gupta period, and one of these, the Boar lifting the goddess Earth, was discovered at

1. Seal No. 5 bears a conch symbol with the legend 'of Nāgadeva' in late Kuṣāṇa script. According to Marshall, it shows that Nāgadeva was a Vaiṣṇava; but conch-shell appears to have been a popular, auspicious object connected with fertility (see Gonda, AEV, pp. 100-1). It is one of the eight *nidhis* of Kubera (see Banerjea, DHI, I ed, pp. 115-6) and is described as living at his court (Hopkins, *Ep. Mytho.*, p. 143). For the connection of Śrī with the eight *nidhis*, see supra, p. 97. In the *Mahābhārata* Śaṅkha is often the name of a nāga. (S.V. Śaṅkha, Sorensen, *Mahābhārata Index*). Hence its appearance on the seal cannot be taken as definite evidence of the Vaiṣṇavite faith of the owner.

2. Marshall, op. cit., Nos. 2, 3, 6, 7, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42, 43, 47, 53, 81, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, Total=21.

Seal No. 7 bears the name Gaurīdāsa who would thus appear to have been a votary of Gaurī, but the symbols, an ornamented wheel with a pair of conches on pedestal, are Vaiṣṇavite. Similarly, the lion on No. 81 appears to represent the *vāhana* of Durgā but the name-legend 'Viṣṇucandra' reflects 'Vaiṣṇavite influence. Sealing No. 47, has a humped bull couchant, but the name of Daṇḍanāyaka Keśavadāsa indicates devotion to Keśava. Nos. 6, 41, 92, bear a conch symbol with no other indications of Vaiṣṇavite associations, and hence are of doubtful nature. No. 43 and 90 have a figure of wheel on pedestal; but the wheel symbol was also used by the worshippers of the Sun and the Buddha and hence, when by itself, provides uncertain evidence.

3. Ibid., Nos. 4, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 30, 31, 37, 38, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 54, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 93, 112. Total=26.

4. Ibid., Nos. 44, 51, 98, 99, 100, 101. Total=6.

5. Agrawala, op. cit., p. 7, Nos. G. 7; E. 6; p. 8, No. K.T. 131; J. N. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, p. 70.

6. *Vi. Pu.*, VI. 8, 31.



Mathura.<sup>1</sup> A mutilated bas-relief<sup>2</sup> of the early Gupta period in the Mathura school of art depicts four-armed Viṣṇu in his Trivikrama form. In front of the deity, king Bali is shown pouring water from a jar. Another Gupta sculpture,<sup>3</sup> portraying the subduing of the nāga Kāliya by Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, was discovered at 'Kaṁsa kā kilā' in Mathura city. It shows Kṛṣṇa holding in his hand a rope (*pāśa*) which is bound round the neck of the nāga. The nāga is represented anthropomorphically with a snake-hood over his head, and the lower portion of the nāgī, his wife, is that of a snake. In later art Kāliya invariably appears in his snake form.

A few of the Śeṣa-Saṅkarṣaṇa images of the Gupta period have also been discovered at different places in U.P. A four-armed figure of Balarāma<sup>4</sup> with a snake canopy was discovered at Bajnā and is placed in the early Gupta period. It holds a pestle and a wine-cup (*vāruṇī pātra*), one of the hands is upraised in a pose similar to that adopted in the nāga statues, and the fourth is missing. The torso of a standing Balarāma image of the fifth century A.D. was found in Raman Koṭhī well beyond Jamna Bāgh. Another torso of approximately the same date, of the same deity with traces of a pestle on the right, was obtained from Goraidhānā in the Iglas subdivision of the Aligarh district.

A colossal figure in Chunar sandstone showing Kṛṣṇa holding aloft the Mount Govardhana was discovered in Banaras city, and is now preserved in the Sārṇāth Museum.<sup>5</sup> Recently the Allahabad Museum has acquired a remarkable Viṣṇu image of the early Gupta period from Jhusi.<sup>6</sup> A stone image of the god in his Trivikrama form has been found at Nainital, and it is stated that the image has the name of the sculptor carved in the Gupta script.<sup>7</sup> Some broken parts of the statues and weapons of the deity, assignable to the early and the late Gupta period, were found at Ahicchatra in the Bareilly district of U.P.<sup>8</sup> A head and the bust of the Man-Lion incarnation

1. Agrawala, op. cit. p. 6, No. D. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 8, No. I, 19.

3. K.D. Bajpai, JUPHS, XXI, 1948, pp. 119-21.

4. Agrawala, op. cit.

5. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, p. 69.

6. *Ind. Arch.*, 1960-61, p. 69. pl. LXXIX. A.

7. Ibid., p. 67.

8. *Anc. Ind.*, No. 4, p. 127.



were also found there. The image holds a lotus flower in the right hand, and is dated in the late Gupta age.<sup>1</sup> The worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī, who was by now fully absorbed into Vaiṣṇavism, also appears to have been very popular in Mathura and the neighbouring regions, and several extant sculptures in Mathura art of the Gupta period depict the famous Gaja-Lakṣmī scene.<sup>2</sup>

An important innovation in Vaiṣṇavite iconography of the Gupta period is the representation of Viṣṇu in his four-faced form, and a number of such sculptures have come to light.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of a passage in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*<sup>4</sup> Banerjea describes this form of Viṣṇu as *Vaikunṭha Caturmūrti*.<sup>5</sup> It is also designated as an image of Mahāviṣṇu.<sup>6</sup> The front face is human shown in a placid attitude, the side ones are of the Boar and the Lion, the back face has a terrible form. When carved in alto-relievo, the back face is naturally not shown, and one such sculpture in mottled sandstone was discovered at Bhankari, a village 14 mile south-west of Aligarh city.<sup>7</sup>

A terracotta plaque,<sup>8</sup> which originally decorated the brick temple at Bhītargāon in the Kanpur district of U.P.,<sup>9</sup> shows Nārāyaṇa lying on the coils of the serpent Śeṣa, a lotus issues out of his navel, and the god Brahmā is seated over it. The two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha are shown in a fighting attitude near the leg of the deity. The temple is generally placed in the latter half of the fifth century A.D. ;<sup>10</sup> and in the centre of the west wall of the temple there is a representation of the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, which led Cunningham to state that the temple was dedicated to Viṣṇu. This is by no means certain.<sup>11</sup> From the positioning of the images of Durgā, Gaṇeśa and Viṣṇu in outer niches it would seem that it was a Śaiva temple and Viṣṇu was worshipped as a subordinate divinity.

1. Ibid., p. 131.

2. Agrawala, op. cit., p. 49.

3. Ibid., pp. 6, 12 Nos. D. 28; 771; 2525; 2419.

4. *Viṣṇudh.*, III. 85. 42-5.

5. Banerjea. *Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1940, p. 62f.

6. M.M. Nagar, *Ind. Hist. Cong.*, Aligarh, 1943, pp. 89-90.

7. Ibid.

8. Banerjea, DHI, II ed, pp. 406-7.

9. ASIAR, 1908-09, pp. 5-16.

10. Banerjea, op. cit.; S.K. Saraswati in *The Classical Age*, p. 512.

11. ASIAR, 1908-09. p. 9.



However, the most notable monument of Gupta Vaiṣṇavism is the Daśāvatāra temple of stone at Deogaḍh in the Jhansi district of U.P. The excavations conducted by D.R. Sahnī showed that the temple was of the *pañcāyatana* type, four small shrines of subordinate divinities stood at the four corners of the main temple. It furnished the earliest example of a temple of this type and is generally ascribed to the early part of the sixth century A.D.<sup>1</sup> An inscription<sup>2</sup> in the Gupta characters found on one of the large pillars in the compound of the temple speaks of a Bhāgavata Govinda, a worshipper of the lord of Keśavapura; and it seems to us that the site was perhaps known as Keśavapura. A number of scenes from the Kṛṣṇa legend, such as Devakī entrusting infant Kṛṣṇa to Vasudeva for carrying him to Nanda, Nanda and Yaśodā caressing Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, the upsetting of the cart, Kṛṣṇa's seizure of Kāṁsa by the hair, the meeting of Sudāmā and Kṛṣṇa etc., is portrayed in the panels of the temple.<sup>3</sup> The east side niche depicts the penance of Nara and Nārāyaṇa;<sup>4</sup> the south side recess gives a glimpse of the fully developed Vaiṣṇavite mythology of the Gupta period. It shows<sup>5</sup> Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu resting on the serpent Śeṣa whose seven hoods form a canopy over him. Lakṣmī sits at his feet, and the goddess Earth stands holding a chowrie. Garuḍa appears on the scene holding a snake and, on the upper part of the panel figure four-faced Brahmā sitting on a lotus, Kārttikeya, Śiva and Pārvatī on the bull Nandī; below are shown the four personified weapons and the two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha. On the right is the figure of Gaṇeśa holding a rosary, a battle-axe, and a bowl of sweat-meats. Thus the whole sculpture reflects a highly advanced stage of the cult. In a southern corner of the temple, a panel shows several scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*,<sup>6</sup> and in a caitya window the god Narasiṃha figures seated on a lotus holding the discus, the club and the conch, three of the well-known weapons of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu.<sup>7</sup> It is the earliest image showing his unmistakably Vaiṣṇavite character. Another incarnation of

1. M.S. Vats, MASI, 70, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 3; 28-9.

3. Ibid., p. 18f.

4. Ibid., p. 14, also see T.N. Ramchandran, IHQ, XXVIII, pp. 191-6.

5. Vats, op. cit., pp. 14-5.

6. Cunningham, ASR, X, pp. 108-9; Banerjea, JISOA, XIV, p. 13.

7. Vats, op. cit., pl. XXII. c; Banerjea, DHI, II ed, p. 417.



Viṣṇu, the Dwarf, is found carved on a sculpture, which is in a badly mutilated<sup>1</sup> condition. The story of the liberation of the elephant (*gaja-mokṣa*) also appears for the first time in a niche at Deogaḍh.<sup>2</sup> Lately, Klaus Bruhn has noticed an image of Kṛṣṇa holding the Govardhana Mount in the vicinity of the temple.<sup>3</sup> The sculpture belongs to the Gupta age.

In Rājasthān, a stone inscription<sup>4</sup> discovered at Nagari begins with an invocation to Viṣṇu and speaks of the erection of a temple of the deity by three vaiśya brothers, Satyasūra, Srugandha and Dāsa. The inscription is dated in A.D. 424, and describes them as the grandsons of Viṣṇucara. The name of the grandfather indicates Vaiṣṇavite influence. Evidently Vaiṣṇavism made continuous progress in the ancient city of Mādhyamikā from the 2nd—1st centuries B.C. down to the Gupta period. Rājasthān has yielded some outstanding Vaiṣṇavite sculptures of the Gupta period. Two red sandstone pillars depicting several incidents from the Kṛṣṇa legend were discovered at Mandor, a place five miles north of Jodhpur.<sup>5</sup> The pillars apparently formed a gateway to some Vaiṣṇavite temple and have the following scenes carved on them :

1. Kṛṣṇa holding the Mount Govardhana on the palm of his hand.
2. Yaśodā churning milk, Kṛṣṇa is shown stealing butter.
3. The upturning of the cart by baby Kṛṣṇa.
4. Yaśodā nursing the baby god on her breasts.
5. The killing of the ass-demon Dhenuka by Balarāma.
6. The subjugation of the nāga Kāliya.

These sculptures are assigned to the fourth century A.D.<sup>6</sup> A mutilated inscription bearing the creed formula of Vāsudeva worshippers *om namo bhagavate Vāsudevāya*, was also discovered at Mandor and is now preserved at Sardar Museum Jodhpur.<sup>7</sup> Tessitory unearthed some baked terracotta bricks depicting the theme of the lifting of the Govardhana Mount and Dānlīlā scenes at

1. Vats, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1; pl. XIX. b.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 13; pl. X. a.
3. *Ind. Arch.*, 1958-59, p. 75; pl. LXXV. D.
4. *Supra*, p. 168.
5. D.R. Bhandarkar, *ASIAR*, 1905-06, pp. 136 f.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
7. R.C. Agrawala, *IHQ*, XXX, 1954, p. 341.



Rangamahā in Bikaner and assigned these to the first century B.C.<sup>1</sup> However, it is pointed out that the sculptures show the influence of the Gāndhāra art, and hence should be attributed to the early Gupta period.<sup>2</sup>

The region of Bihar, which formed a part of the Gupta dominion from the very beginning, also has yielded important Vaiṣṇavite findings. The fragmentary stone inscription<sup>3</sup> discovered in the Muṇḍeśvarī hill of Shahabad district records that a certain Daṇḍanāyaka Gomibhaṭa arranged for the establishment (*samāveśa*) of a shrine (*maṭha*) of Vinīteśvara<sup>4</sup> in the temple of the principal deity Śrī-Nārāyaṇa and provided the offering of two *prasthas* of rice and one *pala* of oil for a lamp for the purposes of the newly established god from the store-room of Śrī-Maṇḍaleśvarasvāmī, evidently the same as Śrī-Nārāyaṇa.<sup>5</sup> The inscription refers to the rule of Mahāsāmanta Mahāpratihāra Mahārāja Udayasena and is dated in the year 30 of an unspecified era. N. G. Majumdar equates it with the Gupta era on palaeographic grounds.<sup>6</sup> The record indicates that about the middle of the fourth century A.D. a temple of Śrī-Nārāyaṇa existed in the Shahabad district. The deity was also known as Maṇḍaleśvara, the presiding god of the region, and a Śaivite divinity was installed in the precincts of his temple as a subsidiary deity. Another epigraph<sup>7</sup> found in a cave of Barābar hill in the district of Gaya states that the Maukhari king Ananta-varman installed an image of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in a cave of Pravaragiri. The Maukhari king appears to have been a Gupta feudatory in the early sixth century A.D., and Pravara-giri is identified by Fleet with modern Barābar hill.

The excavations conducted by Bloch at Basārh (Muzaffarpur district, Bihar) have brought to light a large number of clay seals which illustrate the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism in the Gupta period.

1. *Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Western Circle, Poona, 1921, pp. 95f. ; pl. XX.
2. Agrawala, *IHQ*, XXX, 1954, p. 340.
3. N.G. Majumdar, *IA*, 1920, p. 21f.
4. For this interpretation see K.C. Panigrahi, *JBRS*, XLIV, pts. i-ii, 1958, pp. 15-16 and f.n. 9.
5. *Ibid.*
6. N.G. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 25f.
7. *CII*, III, No. 48.



Fourteen of the official seals described by Bloch bear a representation of the Gaja-Lakṣmī scene with some variations;<sup>1</sup> and one has a figure of the Boar with a conch on either side.<sup>2</sup> Another has a wheel with symbols for the sun and the moon. It belonged to some official of the district of Vaiśālī whose name is now obliterated.<sup>3</sup> Among the seals used by temples and guilds etc. one has the legend *Śrīviṣṇupada-svāmi-nārāyaṇa*, “Nārāyaṇa, the lord of the illustrious Viṣṇupada”,<sup>4</sup> inscribed on it. The symbols appearing on it are described by Bloch as a staff consisting of seven dots, a conch, a wheel and an “ornamental triśūla”. These are obviously the emblems of Viṣṇu, the first is the mace, and the last mentioned is the auspicious ‘nāga symbol’ discussed by Rapson and identified by J. N. Banerjea as the Śrīvatsa.<sup>5</sup> The seal perhaps belonged to the Viṣṇupada temple at Gaya. The real meaning of the legends on two other seals is a little controversial. Bloch describes the seal No. 32 as bearing an ornamental wheel on an altar (*vedī*), two conches with flowers, and the legend *jayatyananto bhagavān sām̐baḥ*, which he interprets as “Victorious is the Lord Ananta (Śiva) with Ambā (Durgā)”.<sup>6</sup> The other seal according to him, has a “shield (?)” on an altar and two conches with the legend *jitam bhagavatonantasya nandeśvarīvarasvāminah*, “Victorious is the Lord Ananta (Śiva), the chosen husband of Nandeśvarī (Durgā)”.<sup>7</sup> J. N. Banerjea states<sup>8</sup> that according to lexicons both Ananta and Nanda are the names of Viṣṇu, and the identification is supported by the emblems on the seals which are Vaiṣṇavite in character. He points out<sup>9</sup> [that [the symbol, described doubtfully as shield by Bloch, is in fact the Śrīvatsa mark, and Ambā and

1. Bloch, ASIAR, 1903-04, p. 107f; see Nos. 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,13,20,21,22,23. Seal No. 28 shows a female standing in a flower-group with two attendants. She may be either Śrī-Lakṣmī, whose connection with fertility we have noted earlier, or Śākambharī, the goddess of vegetation, identified with Durgā. The legend on the seal reads, *vaiśālyam-araprakṛti kuṭumbinām*. Her association with *kuṭumbins* or husbandmen further illustrates her character. For the seal see *ibid.*, p. 110, pl. XL. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 109, seal No. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, No. 27, pl. XLII. 49.

4. *Ibid.*, Seal No. 31, pl. XL 3, *infra*.

5. *Supra*, p. 52.

6. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 111, see pl. XLI. 32.

7. *Ibid.*, No. 37.

8. Banerjea, DHI, I ed; pp. 206-7.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 207.



Nandeśvarī should be identified as Lakṣmī. However, neither the conch-shell<sup>1</sup> nor the Śrīvatsa can be described as typically Vaiṣṇava. The *Anuśāsana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* describes Śiva as *śaṅkhaśūladhara*, holding a conch-shell and a trident;<sup>2</sup> and the Śrīvatsa appears on the breast of several divinities. According to Varāhamihira<sup>3</sup> the god of the Jainas should be shown as bearing the Śrīvatsa mark on his chest. Although an inscription of this period refers to a Vaiṣṇavite god Anantasvāmin<sup>4</sup> and iconographical texts speak of a particular form of Viṣṇu as Ananta,<sup>5</sup> the word simply means 'infinite'. It could have been applied to any god claiming eternity, and the *Anuśāsana Parva* names Śiva as Ananta.<sup>6</sup> The names Ambā and Nandeśvarī denote Durgā, who is sometimes, although only rarely, described as the wife of Nārāyaṇa,<sup>7</sup> and Nārāyaṇī.<sup>8</sup> So it is not impossible that the seals refer to a form of worship in which Nārāyaṇa and Durgā or Nandeśvarī were jointly invoked. The goddess Nandā, apparently the same as Nandeśvarī of the seal, is described in a typical Vaiṣṇavite garb in a passage of the *Varāha Purāṇa* quoted by T.A.G. Rao.<sup>9</sup> It describes her as wearing a *kirīṭa*, the well-known head-dress of Viṣṇu, and holding a discus, mace, conch, noose, sword, bell, bow, and arrows in her eight hands. The implements are characteristically Vaiṣṇavite. But these comparatively rare pieces of evidence are not sufficient, in our opinion, to by-pass the overwhelmingly clear tradition, which makes Śiva the husband of Ambā-Nandeśvarī-Durgā, and at best we may say that the evidence of the seals is inconclusive in determining the personality of the male consort.

1. Supra, p. 182 f.n. 1.

2. *Mbh.*, XIII. 14. 289.

3. Varāhamihira, *The Brhat Samhitā*, 50. 45.

4. Supra, p. 180.

5. T.A.G. Rao, *The Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. 1, *Pratimā Lakṣaṇāni*, p. 60.

6. *Mbh.*, XIII. 14. 305.

7. Hopkins, *Epic. Mytho.*, p. 225. For close connections between Durgā and Lakṣmī see supra, p. 106-8 ; also see Shyam Chand Mukherji, *IHQ*, XXXV. 1959, pp. 189-90 for the description of Durgā as Vaiṣṇavī-Śakti, Nārāyaṇī, Ambikā, and Vaiṣṇavī in the *Devī Māhātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

8. Cf. *Hariv.*, II. 3.1.

9. T.A.G. Rao, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pt. ii. pp. 355-6.



Four of the seals<sup>1</sup> enumerated by Bloch have the sacred formula *jitam bhagavatā*, 'Victory to the *bhagavat*' inscribed on them. Although the term *bhagavat* was applied to other gods also, it usually meant Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, if not accompanied with some qualifying epithet.<sup>2</sup> The phrase appears to have been a creed formula of the Bhāgavatas just as some others, *om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya*, *om namo nārāyaṇāya*, were, and it appears invariably in the Vaiṣṇavite epigraphs only.<sup>3</sup>

A number of Basārḥ seals bear the symbol of an ornamental wheel on them. On some of these it appears alone, and on others along with the conch symbol. Bloch comments<sup>4</sup> that the figure of the ornamental wheel found on these seals is quite unlike the Buddhist symbol of Dharmmacakra. We may state that it is a representation of Viṣṇu's discus, as the form of the wheel appears on the seals which are undoubtedly of a Vaiṣṇavite character.<sup>5</sup> The symbol figures on twenty-three seals<sup>6</sup>, leaving aside those on which it appears along with other Vaiṣṇavite emblems and which have been discussed already, and on eight of the twenty-three seals it is coupled with the conch symbol. We may suggest that the frequent appearance of the wheel symbol on the Basārḥ seals is indicative of the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism in this region. Names such as Kṛṣṇadatta,<sup>7</sup> Keśavadatta,<sup>8</sup> Cakradāsa,<sup>9</sup> Haridāsa,<sup>10</sup> Harigupta,<sup>11</sup> Keśava,<sup>12</sup> Nārāyaṇadatta,<sup>13</sup>

1. Bloch, op. cit., Nos. 33, 34, 35 and 36.

2. Supra., p. 39.

3. Cf. the opening lines of the Poona copp. pl. ins. of Prabhāvatīguptā, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 412; the Rithpur copp. pl. ins. of the same queen, *ibid.*, p. 415; the Narasaraopet copp. pl. ins. of Simhavarman, *ibid.*, p. 445; the Penukoṇḍā copp. pl. ins. of Mādhava, *ibid.* p. 456.

4. Bloch, op. cit., p. 105.

5. Cf. Nos. 31, 34, 36.

6. These are Nos. 38, 40, 41\*, 43, 45\*, 48, 51, 53\*, 55\*, 57, 59\*, 64, 65, 68\*, 91\*, 102, 106, 112, 114, 115, 125, 128\*, 133, Total=23.

Seals marked with asterisk bear the symbol of the conch also.

7. Nos. 45, 78.

8. Nos. 58, 68.

9. No. 54.

10. No. 64.

11. No. 65.

12. Nos. 69, 137.

13. No. 95.



Varāha datta,<sup>1</sup> Varāha,<sup>2</sup> Vāsudeva,<sup>3</sup> and Viṣṇuvarmmā<sup>4</sup> are common on these seals. A *kulika* Hari is mentioned on several sealings,<sup>5</sup> and two refer to a *prathama-kulika* Hari.<sup>6</sup> One artisan at Vaiśālī bore the name Kṛṣṇadatta.<sup>7</sup> These indicate the prevalence of Vaiṣṇavism among people in general and artisans in particular. Three of the seals indicate both Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite influence. One bears the name Bhavadāsa, slave of the god Bhava (Śiva), but it has the symbol of ornamental wheel on it;<sup>8</sup> another of Nārāyaṇadatta, has a humped bull standing on an altar,<sup>9</sup> and the third one, which has a figure of bull couchant, bears the name Vāsudeva inscribed on it.<sup>10</sup> Thus, of the total 139 seals catalogued by Bloch, 56 indicate Vaiṣṇavite influence,<sup>11</sup> and if the evidence of seals only is taken into consideration, it would seem that Vaiṣṇavite influence was more prominent in the Vaiśālī region than at Bhiṭā in Uttar Pradesh. This is remarkable, for with the exception of the solitary doubtful instance of a Viṣṇu image in the Mathura art of the Kuṣāṇa period, found at Hankrail in the Malda district<sup>12</sup> we do not find any evidence of Vaiṣṇavism in the eastern parts of India prior to Gupta rule.

Spooner's excavations<sup>13</sup> also have brought to light interesting findings at Basārḥ for a study of Vaiṣṇavism. A female figure on a platform above a barge depicted on one of the seals is identified by

1. No. 115.
2. No. 115.
3. No. 118.
4. No. 119.
5. Nos. 40, 66, 76, 77.
6. Nos. 66, 99.
7. No. 63.
8. No. 49.
9. No. 95, pl. XLII, 41.
10. No. 118.
11. For the sake of clarity we may recount the total number of seals discovered by Bloch indicating Vaiṣṇavite influence.  
These are: Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 43, 45, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 64, 65, 68, 69, 76, 77, 78, 91, 95, 102, 106, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115, 118, 119, 128, 133.
12. The image which was ascribed by some scholars to the eighth century A.D. is tentatively attributed to the Kuṣāṇa age by S.K. Sarswati in his article 'Early Sculpture of Bengal', p. 14, *Journal of the Department of Letters*, University of Calcutta, XXX, 1938.
13. ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 124f.



J.N. Banerjea as Lakṣmī dwelling in commerce (Vāṇijya-Lakṣmī).<sup>1</sup> Some others show Lakṣmī between the elephants,<sup>2</sup> or simply holding lotus stalk;<sup>3</sup> on one seal appears the figure of the god Narasiṃha seated on a high altar with right arm raised and left on his hip.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the earliest representations of the god Narasiṃha. Thus the cumulative evidence of sealings and inscriptions illustrates fairly well the remarkable progress of Vaiṣṇavism in the region of Bihar.

Further east, Vaiṣṇavism spread during the fourth-fifth centuries not only in Bengal but also in the regions of Assam. The back wall of a ruined cave in the Susunia hill near Bankura in the Bankura district of Bengal has a big wheel with 'flaming rib and hub' incised on it with an inscription which states that it was the work of the illustrious Mahārāja Candra-varman, son of Mahārāja Siṃha-varman, the lord of Puṣkaraṇa, or Puṣkaraṇā.<sup>5</sup> Candra-varman is described as the slave of the lord Cakrasvāmin (owner of the discus, Viṣṇu) to whom evidently the cave and the carved wheel were dedicated. Puṣkaraṇā is identified<sup>6</sup> with modern Pokharna on the river Damodar in the Bānkurā district, and the record is assigned to the fourth century A.D. Another record, the Baigram copperplate inscription of A.D. 448, speaks of the purchase of some land lying between Trivṛtā and Śrīgohālī connected with modern Baigram in the Bogra district of East Pakistan by two householders or agriculturists (*kuṭumbins*) Bhoyila and Bhāskara for the purpose of donating it to the shrine of Govindasvāmin. The shrine was founded by Śivanandin the father of the donors.<sup>7</sup> Thus a temple-shrine (*devakula*) of *bhagavat* Viṣṇu existed under the name Govindasvāmin in the first half of the fifth century A.D. in the Bogra district of East Pakistan. The popularity of the cult is further indicated by the Dhanaidaha copper-plate inscription of the time of Kumāra-gupta I<sup>8</sup>

1. Ibid., pp. 129-30, No. 93; Banerjea, DHI, I ed., p. 211.

2. Ibid., No. 200.

3. Ibid., Nos. 308, 312, 446.

4. ASIAR, 1913-14, p. 133, No. 191, pl. XLVI.

5. EI, XIII, No. 9.

6. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 341, f.n. I.

7. EI, XXI, No. 13, lines 3-4 ; 13-14.

8. EI, XVII, No. 23.



found in the Rajshahi district of East Pakistan. It is dated in Gupta era 113 (A.D. 432-33) and records the donation of some land to a Sāmavedin brāhmaṇa Varāhasvāmin<sup>1</sup> by a person whose name ended in viṣṇu.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the donor had Vaiṣṇavite leanings. The inscription mentions several *mahattaras* or village elders whose names<sup>3</sup> such as. ...viṣṇu, Viṣṇubhadra, Rāmaka, Gopāla and Śrībhadrā exemplify the influence of the cult in this locality. Another inscription of A.D. 479 discovered in the same district mentions persons named Rāmadāsa and Haridāsa.<sup>4</sup>

The Damodarpur copper-plate inscription<sup>5</sup> of the time of Budha-gupta supplies interesting information for the history of Vaiṣṇavism. It records the purchase of some land by the guild president or rich banker (*nagara-śreṣṭhin*) Rbhupāla for building two temples and two store-rooms for the gods Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin near the land already donated by the same banker for the purpose of the two gods.<sup>6</sup> These lands were in the village Doṅgagrāma which appears to have been not far from modern Damodarpur in the Dinajpur district of West Bengal.<sup>7</sup> The record refers to the provincial governor (*uparika*) Jayadatta of Puṇḍravardhana-bhukti (North Bengal) and āyuktaka or administrative officer Ṣaṇḍaka of Koṭivarṣa (modern Bangarh in West Dinajpur district). However, the inscription earlier speaks of the two gods as dwelling on the summit of the Himalayas (*himavatcchikhare*). D.C. Sircar creditably resolves this difficulty after discussing the text of the inscription at length.<sup>8</sup> On the basis of a passage of the *Varāha Purāṇa* he identifies the Kokāmukhatīrtha mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas with the Barāhachatra in Nepal situated on the bank of the river Sun-Kosi, and states that the shrines of the gods Kokāmukhasvāmin and Śvetavarāhasvāmin described as existing on the summit of the Himalayas were situated at this place.<sup>9</sup> Apparently the banker Rbhupāla went on pilgrimage

1. Ibid., line 12.

2. Ibid., line 7.

3. Ibid., lines 4-7.

4. The Paharpur copper-plate Ins. of the G.E. 159. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 347f, line 10 of the ins.

5. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 328-30.

6. Ibid., lines 5-8 of the ins.

7. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 329, f.n. 2; *St. Geo. Anc. Med. Ind.*, p. 218.

8. Ibid., pp. 218-23.

9. Ibid., pp. 221-2.



to Varāhakṣetra-Kokāmukhatīrtha in Nepal and after coming back dedicated some plots of land at his native place in honour of the two gods. But, it seems, it was not quite convenient to send the income accruing from these lands for the gods enshrined at such a long distance, so he erected two shrines of the same gods near the land already dedicated to them. Sircar further points out that the inscription describes the two gods on the top of the Himalayas as *ādyā*, interpreted by him, as 'original'; and the images of the two gods bearing the same names were installed in the two temples built by Ṛbhupāla.<sup>1</sup> The explanation of Sircar is supported by the fact that the dedication of land by Ṛbhupāla preceded the erection of the shrines of the two gods. Thus the inscription records the existence of the temples of Śvetavarāhasvāmin and Kokāmukhasvāmin, the two forms of the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu<sup>2</sup> not only in the Dinajpur district of West Bengal but also at Barāhchatra in Nepal. Another copper-plate inscription<sup>3</sup> dated in the year 224 of Gupta era (A.D. 543-4) discovered at the same place records the purchase of some land by a noble man (*kulaputraka*) Amṛtadeva for donating it for the repairs of the temple of Śvetavarāhasvāmin<sup>4</sup> and the arrangements of *bali*, *caru*, *sattra*, the supply of cow's milk, incense, flowers, *madhuparka*,<sup>5</sup> and lamp etc., to increase the religious merit of his mother. The grant was made in favour of the temple built by Ṛbhupāla in the forest region (*atrāraṇye*)<sup>6</sup> for the original god on the hill-top in Nepal. Amṛtadeva is said to be a resident of Ayodhyā, and it is interesting that a man from the Faizabad district of U.P. made donations to a deity established somewhere near Damodarpur in the Dinajpur district of Bengal.

A copper-plate inscription<sup>7</sup> of A.D. 507 mentions twice<sup>8</sup> a temple of the god Pradyumneśvara in defining the boundaries of

1. Sircar reads the passage as follows :

*tatkṣetra-sāmīpya-bhūmau taylorādyā-kokāmukhasvāmi—  
śvetavarāhasvāminornāmalingamenam devakuladvayam—  
etakoṣṭhikādvayañca*, *ibid.*, p. 223, f.n. 1.

2. *Supra*, p. 122.
3. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 337-40.
4. *Ibid.*, lines 8-9 of the ins.
5. For the explanation of these terms, *ibid.*, p. 338, f.n. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 338, line 8 of the ins.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 331-5.
8. *Ibid.*, lines 18-19 ; 21 of the ins.



some land near Guṇekāgrahārāgrāma, identified<sup>1</sup> with modern Guṇaighar in the Tippera district of East Pakistan where it was found. Pradyumneśvara<sup>2</sup> appears to have been a composite deity, a combination of Viṣṇu and Śiva, like the better known Harihara form of the two gods.

By the beginning of the sixth century, Bengal had become one of the strongholds of Vaiṣṇavism and a large number of sculptures depicting various incidents of Kṛṣṇa and Saṅkarṣaṇa legends such as uprooting of the twin Arjuna trees, the killing of the horse-demon Keśin, of Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, carrying of the infant Kṛṣṇa to Gokula etc., has been discovered at Paharpur in the Rajshahi district.<sup>3</sup> The oldest of these sculptures, which are spread over nearly three centuries, are dated in the sixth century A.D. and indicate the popularity of the cult which led to the employment of the local artists for the decoration of the basement of the temple at the site where these are found. In the district of Burdwan, at Chaitanpur, a black basalt standing image of Viṣṇu was discovered.<sup>4</sup> R.P. Chanda described it as an inferior product of the Gupta age ; but Banerjea thinks that it is an *abhicārakasthānakamūrti* of Viṣṇu, a standing image worshipped for malevolent purposes, ascribable to the eighth century A.D.<sup>5</sup>

During the Gupta rule Vaiṣṇavism secured its foothold in the regions of Assam also. An inscription,<sup>6</sup> engraved on a rock near the Umācala Āśrama, a place on the north-eastern slope of the Kāmākhyā or Nīlācala hill near Gauhati, states that Mahārāja Surendra-varman had a cave-temple excavated for the god Balabhadrasvāmin. It is suggested<sup>7</sup> that the king should be identified with Mahendra-varman of the Bhauma or Nāraka dynasty of Prāgjyotiṣa. He is supposed to have ruled from A.D. 470 to 494, and palaeographically the record seems to be of the same period. The kingdom of

1. Ibid., p. 334, f.n. 5.

2. A temple of the same deity, Pradyumneśvara, is also mentioned in the Deopara inscription of Mahārājā Vijayasena of Bengal. K.G. Goswami, *A Study of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 24.

3. ASIAR, 1926-27, p. 140f; for a detailed description see K.N. Dikshit, *The Excavations at Paharpur*, MASI, No. 55.

4. ASIAR, 1925-26, p. 153.

5. Banerjea, JISOA, XIII, 1945, p. 74.

6. EI, XXXI, No. 10.

7. D.C. Sircar and P.D. Chaudhury, *ibid.*, p. 68.



Prāgjyotiṣa or Kamarūpa was a feudatory state of Samudra gupta, and it is stated that the local ruling dynasty might have owed its rise to the Gupta king<sup>1</sup>. It appears to us that Vaiṣṇavism spread in the Assam region during the rule of these feudatory chiefs under the influence of the Guptas. The name of the son and successor of king Mahendra-varman, Nārāyaṇa-varman, also indicates Vaiṣṇavite influence.

We have already mentioned the existence of the shrines of the two forms of the Boar incarnations of Viṣṇu, Śvetavarāhasvāmin and Kokāmukhasvāmin in Barāhchatra in Nepāl, referred to in a Damodarpur copper-plate inscription of the fifth century A.D.; a record<sup>2</sup> of king Mahādeva discovered in the Cāṅgu Nārāyaṇa temple near Kāṭhamaṇḍu further shows the progress of Vaiṣṇavism in Nepāl. It speaks of the god Hari, whose broad chest is marked with Śrīvatsa and who causes the three worlds to move, as living on the Mount Dolādri identified with the hill on which the temple stands. The inscription is dated in the year 386 of some era, and is attributed to fourth-fifth century A.D. by Bhagavanlal Indraji and D.C. Sircar on palaeographical grounds.<sup>3</sup>

In Central India, Vaiṣṇavism appears to have been very popular, and a good many epigraphs and sculptures connected with Viṣṇu-worship have been found in the region comprising modern Madhya Pradesh. A colossal relief depicting the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu was discovered at Udayagiri, the well-known hill near Bhilsa in Madhya Pradesh; it was ascribed by Coomaraswamy to A.D. 400.<sup>4</sup> The Udayagiri cave inscription<sup>5</sup> of the time of Candragupta II dated in A.D. 401-2 records the dedication of a religious gift by a certain Sanakānīka feudatory. As the inscription is engraved above two sculptures, one of which is a four-armed image of Viṣṇu and the other a twelve-armed goddess, apparently these are the gifts mentioned in it. The goddess is probably Lakṣmī or Durgā in her Yogamāyā form; the

1. R.C. Majumdar, *The Classical Age*. p. 89.

2. Bhagavanlal Indraji, *IA*, IX, 1880, p. 163f; Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 266-9; lines 3-6 of the ins.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 365, f.n. 1.

4. Coomaraswamy, *HIIA*, fig. 174.

5. *CII*, III, No. 3.



worship of Durgā or of her different forms with Viṣṇu is not unknown during this period<sup>1</sup>. Evidence of such joint worship is mostly found in the epigraphs of Central India, in the Vindhya region, where the cult of the aboriginal mother-goddesses had a very stronghold. Another inscription of A.D. 423 states that Mayurākṣaka, a feudatory of king Viśva-varman, built two temples, one for Viṣṇu<sup>2</sup> and the other for the Divine Mothers.<sup>3</sup> Mayūrākṣaka is described as extremely devoted to the god who wields the discus and the club,<sup>4</sup> evidently Viṣṇu, and his devotion is further exemplified in the names of his sons Viṣṇubhaṭa and Haribhaṭa.<sup>5</sup> The record is inscribed on a stone tablet found near the village Gangadhar in the former Jhālāwād state of Central India.

About 50 miles north-east of Bhilsa, a group of temples stands at Eran in the Saugor district of Madhya Pradesh which has yielded interesting material for the study of Vaiṣṇavism. The fragmentary Eran stone inscription of Samudra-gupta<sup>6</sup> is too mutilated to indicate its nature; it seems to record the setting up of a pillar of some kind,<sup>7</sup> but from the shape and appearance of the stone Cunningham remarked<sup>8</sup> that it was probably attached to the temple containing a colossal figure of Viṣṇu standing north of the Boar temple. The representation of a Garuḍa-pillar on the coins of Samudra-gupta discloses his devotion to Viṣṇu, and it is very probable that the inscription recorded some dedication of a Vaiṣṇavite character. More definite is the evidence of the stone pillar inscription<sup>9</sup> of the time of Budha-gupta at Eran which speaks of the dedication of a *dhvajastambha* or flag-staff of Viṣṇu by a Mahārāja Matriviṣṇu,<sup>10</sup> son of the son's son of Indra-viṣṇu, grandson of Varuṇa-viṣṇu, and son of Hari-viṣṇu. The family had a continuous tradition of devotion to Viṣṇu for four generations. The inscription begins with an invocation to the four-

1. Supra, p. 106-8 ; 188-9.

2. CII, III, No. 3, lines 30-1.

3. Ibid., lines 36-7.

4. Ibid., lines 26.

5. Ibid., line 29.

6. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 260-02.

7. Ibid., p. 262, line 25 of the ins.

8. Cunningham, ASR, X, p. 89, pl. XXV B and XXVI B.

9. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 326f,

10. Ibid., lines 8-9 of the ins.



armed god whose couch is the waters of the four oceans, who is the cause of the origin, maintenance and dissolution of the universe, and who has Garuḍa on his banner.<sup>1</sup> The Eran stone Boar inscription<sup>2</sup> of the time of Toramāṇa recorded by Dhanya-*viṣṇu*, younger brother of Mahārāja Mātr-*viṣṇu* mentions the setting up of a stone temple of the god Nārāyaṇa, the protector of the universe having the form of the Boar, in the district of Airikina (modern Eran<sup>3</sup>). Apparently it refers to the existing stone temple in which the Boar still stands. The invocatory verse speaks of the deity as one who, when engaged in rescuing the Earth as Varāha, caused the mountains to tremble by the blow of his hard snout, and who was like a pillar for the three worlds. A little earlier, another stone inscription<sup>4</sup> engraved on a pillar at Eran and dated in A.D. 410-1, speaks posthumously of a king Goparāja and his wife who accompanied him on his funeral pyre. Goparāja may have been a neighbouring feudatory chief, who died in a battle against perhaps the Hūṇas under his overlord Bhānugupta. The names of the chief Goparāja and his father Mādhava are borrowed from Vaiṣṇavism. Recently a stone representation of Gajalakṣmī datable in the Gupta period was discovered at Eran.<sup>5</sup>

Five epigraphs of the Gupta period discovered at Mandasor refer to the cult of *Viṣṇu* in some way or the other. The earliest of these, the Mandasor inscription of the time of Naravarman dated in A.D. 404, begins with an invocation to *Viṣṇu*, described as the thousand-headed *Puruṣa*, who sleeps on the waters of the four oceans which constitute his bedstead.<sup>6</sup> The inscription further describes god *Vāsudeva* as one, who is the abode of the whole universe (*jagadvāsa*) who is immeasurable (*aprameya*); unborn (*aja*) and all-powerful (*vibhu*), who, like a great tree with the gods as its fruits, women of the heaven (*apsarases*), as its beautiful shoots, heavenly chariots as its branches, bestows honey in the form of rain-drops.<sup>7</sup> Evidently, this is a reference to his universal (*viśvarūpa*) form which became very popular in the Gupta sculpture. The popularity of Vaiṣṇavite

1. Ibid., lines 1-2.

2. CII, III, No. 36.

3. Ibid., line 7.

4. Sircar, op. cit., p. 335-6.

5. K.D. Bajpai, *Ind. Arch.*, 1960-61, p. 60, pl. LXXI. A.

6. EI. XII, No. 35, line 1.

7. Ibid., lines 7-8.



imagery is further evinced by the latter portion of the Mandasor inscription of the time of Bandhuvarman bearing the date of A.D. 473. It refers to the chest of Śarṅgin as adorned with the jewel Kaustubha.<sup>1</sup> The inscription ends with a prayer that the temple of the sun, mentioned therein, may exist as long as god Śarṅgin wears a garland of full-blown water lilies on his shoulders.<sup>2</sup> A little later, yet another inscription discovered at Mandasor begins with the creed formula of the Bhāgavatas, *jitaṃ bhagavatā*, and an eulogy of Viṣṇu Cakrapāṇi (the wielder of the discus), who is said to move about in a chariot that is Garuḍa.<sup>3</sup> The inscription is of Mahārāja Gauri, who was, according to D.C. Sircar,<sup>4</sup> a feudatory chief of the king Ādityavardhana of the Aulikara dynasty. The record speaks of the excavation of a tank by Mahārāja Gauri in the suburbs of Daśapura, the ancient name of modern Mandasor, for the merit of his deceased mother, and it is not dated; but another epigraph<sup>5</sup> of the same Mahārāja, recording the construction of a temple of goddess Devī by him, bears the date A.D. 491; hence his Mandasor record obviously belongs to the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. Of the remaining two inscriptions, the Mandasor stone pillar inscription of Yaśodharman, although a Śaiva record, inasmuch as it begins with an adoration of Śiva, refers to Śarṅgapāṇi, the god who has the bow Śarṅga in his hand (Viṣṇu), and compares the toughness of the forearm of king Yaśodharman, with that of the deity, on account of his incessant wielding of the bow.<sup>6</sup> Another inscription of the same king found at the same place and dated A.D. 532 refers to Varāhadāsa, an ancestor of Dharmadoṣa, the minister of Yaśodharman *alias* Viṣṇuwardhana, and states that Varāhadāsa was likened to an incarnate portion of the god Hari.<sup>7</sup> Thus Vaiṣṇavism appears to have been very popular in the Mandasor region.

A fragmentary inscription<sup>8</sup> of Ghaṭotkaca-gupta bearing the date of A.D. 435-6 was found at Tumain in the Esāgaḍh district of the

1. Sircar. *Sel. Ins.*, p. 296, line 22 of the ins.

2. *Ibid.*, line 23.

3. EI, XXX, No. 22, ins. No. ii, lines 1-2.

4. Sircar, EI, XXXIII, pp. 205-8.

5. *Ibid.*, Choṭi Sadri ins., No. i.

6. CII, III, No. 33, line 2.

7. *harerivāṇśam vaśinam varārham varāhadāsam yamudārahanti.* Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 389, line 11 of the ins.

8. EI, XXVI, No. 11.



former Gwalior state. It records the erection of a temple of some deity by five brothers named Śrīdeva, Harideva, Dhanyadeva, Bhadradeva and Saṃghadeva who were residents of Tumbavana (modern Tumain) at their native place. Although the identity of the god is not known, the names of the two first-mentioned brothers betray Vaiṣṇavite influence.

In the Berar region of Mahārāstra the inscriptions of queen Prabhāvatī-guptā bear witness to the popularity of the cult. The queen, like her father Candragupta II, was a devout worshipper of the *bhagavat* Viṣṇu, and her husband, Vākāṭaka Mahārāja Rudrasena II, also had adopted Vaiṣṇavism providing the only exception in an otherwise staunch Śaivite line. In an inscription of Pravarasena II Rudrasena is said to have earned an abundance of prosperity through the favour of the lord Cakrapāṇi.<sup>1</sup> The inscriptions of queen Prabhāvatī-guptā begin with the favourite Bhāgavata phrase *jitam bhagavatā*, and her Poona copper-plate inscription<sup>2</sup> is issued from Nāndīvardhana, identified by some with Nāgardhan, 13 miles north of Nagpur, and by others with Nandpur about 21 miles north of Nāgardhan.<sup>3</sup> At any rate, it was not far from Nagpur. It records a land-gift made by the queen, who first offered it at the feet of the *bhagavat*.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps, some shrine of Viṣṇu at Nāndīvardhana is meant. The engraver of these plates bore the name Cakradāsa (the slave of the discus). The Rithpur copper-plate inscription is issued from the feet of the god Rāmagirisvāmin,<sup>5</sup> and it is held<sup>6</sup> that it refers to a shrine containing the footprints of Viṣṇu or Rāma, son of Daśaratha, at Rāmagiri, modern Rāmtek near Nagpur. Another Vākāṭaka grant, the Paṭṭan plates of Pravarasena II, speaks of a shrine containing the footprints of Viṣṇu under the name Mahāpuruṣa. A certain Nārāyaṇarāja donated some land for the maintenance of the *sattra* in honour of the deity.<sup>7</sup> Paṭṭan is a village in the Multai tahsīl of the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh, and the shrine appears to have existed at some place nearabout.

1. Chammak ins. of Pravarasena II, lines 13-4, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.* p. 420.

2. Ibid., p. 411f.

3. Sircar, AIU, p. 181.

4. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 413, line 14 of the ins.

5. *rāmagirisvāmin pādamūlāt*, Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 415, line 1 of the ins.

6. Mirashi, EI, XXIV, p. 12.

7. EI, XXIII, No. 14.



Khoh in the former Nagod state of Central India is another important find-spot of Vaiṣṇavite inscriptions. A Khoh copper-plate inscription<sup>1</sup> of Mahārāja Jayanātha of Uccakalpa dynasty records the grant of a village Dhavaṣaṇḍikā to some brāhmaṇas to meet the cost of the regular performance of *bali*, *caru*, *sattra*, and other such rites at a temple of Viṣṇu established by them. The grant bears the date of A.D. 496-7 and mentions the deity under the name *bhagavat*. Another Khoh copper-plate inscription<sup>2</sup> of A.D. 513 records the gift of the village Āśramaka by Mahārāja Śarvanātha in favour of the temples of the deities mentioned as the *bhagavat*, and the Āditya-bhaṭṭāraka, the Sun-god. The temple of the *bhagavat*, apparently the god Viṣṇu, was built by one Viṣṇunandin.<sup>3</sup> The faith of the Mahārāja is further evidenced by the seal attached to the plates ; it has a figure of Garuḍa in relief. A second copper-plate inscription<sup>4</sup> of the same king discovered at Khoh mentions the grant of the village Dhavaṣaṇḍikā to Choḍugomika and his descendants to meet the expenses of worship, repairs, etc., of the goddess Piṣṭapurikādevī. As the same village was earlier allotted to a temple of Viṣṇu by Mahārāja Jayanātha, Fleet suggested that the goddess Piṣṭapurikā was a form of Lakṣmī.<sup>5</sup> A little later in A.D. 533-4, Śarvanātha allotted two villages Vyāghrapallikā and Kācarapallikā in Maṇināga-peṭha to the same goddess for the same purposes according to yet another Khoh copper-plate inscription ;<sup>6</sup> and her temple is said to have been built at Mānapura, identified with modern Manpur near the river Son in Madhya Pradesh. The goddess also figures in a land-grant made by king Saṃkṣobha in A.D. 529, discovered at the same place.<sup>7</sup> It is stated that the king donated half of the village Opāni in Maṇināga-peṭha to Choḍugomin, mentioned as Choḍugomika in the earlier inscription, for the observance of *bali*, *caru*, and *sattra*, and the repairs of the temple of the goddess Piṣṭapurī in order to increase the religious merit of his parents and his own.<sup>8</sup> King Saṃkṣobha was a devout Vaiṣṇava ; he is described as *parama-*

1. CII, III, No. 27.

2. CII, III, No. 28.

3. Ibid., lines 11-16; for a refutation of Fleet's interpretation of the text see D.C. Sircar in *The Classical Age*, p. 421.

4. CII, III, No. 29, lines 6-13.

5. *Supra*, p. 106.

6. CII, III, No. 31, lines 6-7 ; 11-12.

7. Ibid., No. 25.

8. Ibid., lines 11-14.



*bhāgavata*,<sup>1</sup> and his inscriptions begin with an invocation to *bhagavat* Vāsudeva<sup>2</sup> or Nārāyaṇa.<sup>3</sup>

A stone epigraph<sup>4</sup> of a Nala king, whose name appears to have been Skanda-varman, described as the son of king Bhavadatta, was found at Poḍāgaḍh in the Koraput district of Orissa, near the borders of the old Bastar state in the modern Madhya Pradesh. It is dated in the twelfth regnal year of the king, and is assigned palaeographically to the latter half of the fifth century A.D. The inscription refers to the construction of the footprint (*pādamūla*) or a shrine containing the footprint of Viṣṇu,<sup>5</sup> and it seems that it was built at Poḍāgaḍh. The record begins with a eulogy of the god Viṣṇu who is described as ever victorious, and who is not only the conqueror but also the conquered<sup>6</sup>. Several names of the deity, Hari,<sup>7</sup> Viṣṇu,<sup>8</sup> Puruṣa<sup>9</sup> and Vāsudeva<sup>10</sup> occur in the inscription.

Recently, rock-cut sculptures attributed to the Gupta period were discovered at Sindursi in the Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh<sup>11</sup>. These depict the god Viṣṇu in various forms, standing, sleeping on his serpent-bed, and in his Narasiṃha form. An image of Narasiṃha was earlier found at Besnagar also. Coomaraswamy<sup>12</sup> ascribed it to the sixth century A.D. The image is now deposited in the Gwalior Museum.

In Western India, the Junāgarh rock inscription<sup>13</sup> of the time of Skanda-gupta is a remarkable Vaiṣṇavite document. The opening verse is a eulogy of Viṣṇu, and the language of the whole epigraph is conspicuously Vaiṣṇavite. Vaiṣṇavite phraseology is resorted to for

1. Ibid., line 10.

2. Ibid., line 1.

3. The Betul plate ins., line 1. EI, VIII, No. 28.

4. EI, XXI, No. 24.

5. Ibid., line 5,

6. Ibid., lines 1-2.

7. Ibid., line 1.

8. Ibid., line 5.

9. Ibid., line 6.

10. Ibid., line 11.

11. *Ind. Arch.*, 1960-61, p. 60.

12. Coomaraswamy, HIIA, p. 240, Fig. 170.

13. CII, III, No. 14.



extolling the ruling monarch.<sup>1</sup> The second part of the inscription records the building of a temple of Cakrabhṛt (the holder of the discus), a name of Viṣṇu, by Cakrapālita, son of Paṇḍadatta. The temple which was situated atop Mount Ūrjayat,<sup>2</sup> modern Gīrnār, took a long time to build and cost a huge amount of money.<sup>3</sup> It must have been a magnificent construction and a notable place for pilgrimage. It was completed in A.D. 456-7. The inscription describes Cakrapālita as one who has devoted his life to the feet of Govinda and obtained the nearness to Viṣṇu's lotus-like feet.<sup>4</sup> Apparently the viceroy of Saurāṣṭra and the Governor of Gīrinagara, Paṇḍadatta and his son Cakrapālita respectively, followed Vaiṣṇavism in all earnestness.

In the second half of the fifth century A.D. Saurāṣṭra passed into the hands of the rulers of the Maitraka clan, who, with the exception of Dhruvasena I, were the devotees of god Śiva. Dhruvasena I is consistently described as a *parama-bhāgavata* in the records of this dynasty<sup>5</sup> although his predecessors and successors are mentioned as *parama-māheśvaras*. These records are issued from Valabhī, identified with modern Walā in the old Bhavanagar state in Eastern Kāṭhiāwār,<sup>6</sup> and the villages mentioned in the numerous land grants issued by these rulers were situated in this area. A sculpture obtained from Valabhī and assignable to the fifth century A.D. depicts Kṛṣṇa slaying the horse-demon Keśin.<sup>7</sup> The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* refers to a temple of Vāsudeva at Dvārakā.<sup>8</sup> The passage, which speaks of Uddhava as a *mahābhāgavata*,<sup>9</sup> an epithet similar to those occurring in the Gupta epigraphs, may have been composed during this period, and thus supplies literary evidence of the existence of a temple of Viṣṇu at Dvārakā. Apparently, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism flourished side by side in Western India. A Buddhist Ajantā cave inscription illustrates the keen competition between the different sects during this period. It states that the gods are subject to distress

1. Ibid., lines 3 and 5.

2. Ibid., lines 27-8.

3. Ibid., lines 25-6.

4. Ibid., line 25.

5. Ganeshgad plates of Dhruvasena I, EI, III, No. 46, line 10; "The five Valabhī plates", EI, XI, No. 9.

6. EI, XVI, p. 18.

7. U.P. Shah, *The Journal of Indian Museum*, Bombay, IX, p. 163.

8. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 37. 36.

9. Ibid., v. 31.



and hence are devoid of victory ; god Śambhu is of tremulous eyes because of a curse ; Kṛṣṇa too, who never obeyed any other person's command, had to submit to Antaka (the god of Death) ; hence only the sugatas, who are absolutely free from fears, are ever victorious.<sup>1</sup> It is stated that the alphabets of this record resemble the early Valabhī copper-plates ; so it should be ascribed to the end of the fifth or the first part of the sixth century A.D.

The Traikūṭaka Mahārājas Dahrasena and Vyāghrasena, whose grants are dated in the second half of the fifth century A.D., proclaimed themselves as *parama-vaiṣṇava* on their coins.<sup>2</sup> They assumed the title of “the hired labourers of the feet of the *bhagavat*” (*bhagavat-pāda-karmakara*) in their inscriptions<sup>3</sup> and made liberal donations to brāhmaṇas on the full moon day in Kārttika,<sup>4</sup> a practice which had become thoroughly Vaiṣṇavised in the Gupta period.<sup>5</sup> The Traikūṭakas appear to have ruled over parts of Aparānta ; and their coins are found in southern Gujarat and portions of Mahārāṣṭra.<sup>6</sup> The popularity of Vaiṣṇavism on the western coast is further attested to by the Banaras plates of a Śūravaṃśī king Harirāja,<sup>7</sup> whose name indicates Vaiṣṇavite influence. He made donations on the great full-moon day in the month of Kārttika (*mahā-kārttika pūrṇamāsī*), which was during this period known as the day of Viṣṇu's awakening.<sup>8</sup> He is supposed to have ruled over the Surat region after the fall of the Traikūṭakas, and the palaeography of the Banaras plates suggests that his rule should be placed in the first half of the sixth century A.D.<sup>9</sup>

A copper-plate grant<sup>10</sup> of a king Candra-varman found at Goa seems to bear the figure of a boar. The king granted land to a

1. *devā nirastavijayās savipattikatvāc-chāpena śambhur apikācaralocanobhūt kṛṣṇovaśopi vasam apatitontakasya—tasmājjayanti sugatā bhayavipramuktāḥ*. Burgess. *Buddhist Cave Temples And Their Inscriptions*, Archaeological Survey of Western India, Vol. IV, London, 1883, p. 134.
2. Rapson, *Cat. Āndhra etc.*, p. ccvii.
3. Pardi plates of Mahārāja Dahrasena of A.D. 456, lines 1-2, CII, IV, pt. i, No. 8 ; Surat plates of Mahārāja Vyāghrasena of A.D. 490, EI, XI, No. 21, line 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Supra.
6. Sircar in *The Classical Age*, p. 192.
7. *Anc. Ind.*, No. 5, pp. 47-8 ; pls. XXI-XXII
8. Supra.
9. Sircar, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-4.
10. ABORI, XXIII, p. 510f.



Buddhist monastery at Śivapura, situated somewhere in the Goa region. The boar crest may refer to the Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu. The record is ascribed to the fifth century A.D. on palaeographic grounds.

During the Gupta period the majority of the rulers, whether in the North or in the South, even those who favoured other sects, were swayed by Vaiṣṇavism. The Ānanda king Damodara varman, who issued the Mattepad grant, was a devotee of the lord *samyak-sambuddha* (the Buddha); but he bears a Vaiṣṇavite name. King Damodara-varman appears to have ruled in the first half of the fifth century A.D. in the region round Guntur in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> Among the Śālaṅkāyana kings, who are mentioned in their inscriptions as the devotees of the god Citrarathasvāmin,<sup>2</sup> to be identified very probably with the Sun-god, some favoured Śaivism and others Vaiṣṇavism. An inscription<sup>3</sup> of a Śālaṅkāyana king Śrī-vijaya Nandi-varman, who is generally placed in the second half of the fifth century A.D.,<sup>4</sup> describes the king as a *parama-bhāgavata*. The Śālaṅkāyanas ruled over the regions round the Godāvarī and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.

During the fifth-sixth centuries A.D., the kings of the Pitṛbhakta, Māṭhara and Eastern Gaṅga dynasties held their sway over the ancient Kalinga country, which comprised roughly the land between the rivers Mahānadī and Godāvarī on the eastern coast. Most of these rulers were devoted to Vaiṣṇavism. The Bobbili plates<sup>5</sup> of king Caṇḍa-varman of the pitṛbhakta dynasty describes him as a *parama-bhāgavata*, lord of Kalinga. The grant is issued from Siṃhapura, identified by Hultzsch<sup>6</sup> with modern Singupuram, near Srikakulam, and it is ascribed to the first half of the fifth century A.D. Another king of the same line, Mahārāja Nanda-Prabhañjana-varman, is spoken of as a *parama-bhāgavata* in a grant,<sup>7</sup> which in the words of Fleet is "certainly pre-Cālukyan." Among the Māṭhara kings, the Ningondi

1. Sircar, *The Classical Age*, pp. 202; 204.

2. For Citrarathasvāmin, see B. Rao, EI, XXXI, p. 8.

3. IA, V, p. 176.

4. Sircar, op. cit., p. 205.

5. EI, XXVII, No. 8.

6. EI, IV, p. 143; XII, p. 4.

7. IA, XIII, p. 49f.



grant<sup>1</sup> of Mahārāja Prabhañjana-varman refers to him as a devotee of the *bhagavat* Svāmi-Nārāyaṇa; it records the gift of land situated on the shore of the bay of Bengal by the king to some brāhmaṇa on the twelfth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Kārttika.<sup>2</sup> Apparently the king made the donation after observing the sacred *Kārttika-ekādaśī vrata* of the Vaiṣṇavas.<sup>3</sup> The grant is assigned to the fifth or early sixth century A.D. The Māṭhara king Ananta-Śakti-varman, who was perhaps the son and successor of Prabhañjana-varman, also followed Vaiṣṇavism. His Andhavaram plates<sup>4</sup> describe him as the devout worshipper of the lotus-feet of the lord Nārāyaṇa, whose chest is graced by Kamalanilayā (Śrī-Lakṣmī). The Māṭhara kings assumed the title of *parama-daivata*, stressing thereby their identity with the god.<sup>5</sup> The family deity of the Eastern Gaṅgas was lord Gokaṛṇeśvara, identified with a form of Śiva, whose temple stood at Mahendragiri in the Ganjam district; but some of these kings patronised Vaiṣṇavism also. The Narasingapalli plates<sup>6</sup> of the Gaṅga king Hasti-varman record the grant of a piece of land by the king, who himself is described as a *parama-māheśvara* and devotee of the god Gokaṛṇeśvara, for meeting the expenses of the worship of the god Nārāyaṇa, known as Raṇabhītodaya,<sup>7</sup> and the repairs of his temple at the request (?) or recommendation of *bhogika* Buddhamañcin. Thus although the favourite family deity of the king was Śiva, he or one of his officials set up an image of Nārāyaṇa and named it after the king who had assumed the title (*biruda*) of Raṇabhīta. The inscription describes<sup>8</sup> *bhagavat* Nārāyaṇa as one who lies on the seven seas, is sung in the seven Sāman hymns, and is the sole possessor of the seven worlds. R.C. Majumdar, the editor of the inscription, points out that all the three epithets of the deity occur in the *Raghuvamśa*.<sup>9</sup> The charter, dated in the year 79 of the Gaṅga era, belongs to the last quarter of the sixth century and further

1. EI, XXX, No. 20.

2. Ibid., lines 15-6,

3. Supra.

4. EI, XXVIII, No. 31.

5. Supra.

6. EI, XXIII, No. 10.

7. Ibid., line 13.

8. Ibid., lines 12-14.

9. *Raghuvamśa*, X, 21.



proves the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism in the Eastern Deccan, for the Eastern Gaṅgas had their capital at Kalinga-nagara identified with modern Mukhalingam in the Ganjam district of Orissa.

In the last quarter of the fifth and early sixth centuries A.D., kings of a dynasty, which had its capital at Śarabhapura, describe themselves as *parama-bhāgavatas* in their charters,<sup>1</sup> and their seals bear a figure of Gaja-Lakṣmī. The exact location of Śarabhapura is not yet settled;<sup>2</sup> it has been identified with places in the district of Sambalpur in Orissa and in the region round Raipur in Madhya Pradesh. Its identity with the chief town of the same name in the Sundargarh district of Orissa has also been advocated.<sup>3</sup> Whatever might be the site of their capital city, the Śarabhapurīya kings ruled over Dakṣiṇa Kośala, the region roughly corresponding to the Bilaspur and the Raipur districts of Madhya Pradesh and the Sambalpur district in Orissa. The gold coins of Mahārāja Prasannamātra, an early king of the same dynasty, have a figure of Garuḍa on the obverse with the symbol of discus on its right and conch on its left.<sup>4</sup> This shows that the king was undoubtedly a Vaiṣṇava. He appears to have ruled from A.D. 490 to 510 and was perhaps the grandson of the founder king Śarabha, identified with the maternal grandfather of the same name of the Gupta feudatory Goparāja who died at Eran in A.D. 510.<sup>5</sup> His predecessor and the successor, Mahārāja Narendra<sup>6</sup> and Mahā-Jayarāja,<sup>7</sup> who were apparently his father and son respectively, are mentioned as *parama-bhāgavatas* in their grants.

Further south, the popularity of Vaiṣṇavism may be gleaned from such names as Viṣṇugopa, the Pallava king of Kāñcī, mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudra-gupta.<sup>8</sup> Obviously as early as the fourth century A.D. Vaiṣṇavism had penetrated deep into the south. A copper-plate inscription<sup>9</sup> of the time of Skanda-

1. Kurud plates of Mahārāja Narendra (son of the founder king Śarabha), EI, XXXI, Nos. 35 and 36; the Arang plates of Mahā-Sudevarāja, *ibid.*, XXIII, No. 3.

2. Sircar in *The Classical Age*, p. 219.

3. L.P. Pandeya, *Proceedings of the fifth Oriental Conference*, p. 461f.

4. V. P. Rode, JNSI, XII, p. 9.

5. *Supra*, p. 198.

6. Kurud plates.

7. Arang Copp. pl. of Mahā-Jayarāja, CII, III, No. 40.

8. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, line 10 of the ins.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 443-5; lines 7-10 of ins.



varman found at Guṇapadeya in the Guntur district of Andhra state records the donation of some field to the temple (*devakula*) of the god Nārāyaṇa at Dālūra by Cāru-devī, wife of the Pallava Yuvamahārāja Śrī-Vijaya-Buddhavarman of the Bhāradvāja gotra. The temple was established by a village elder (*mahattara*) named Kūli. The record is ascribed to the fourth century A.D. Some of the Western Gaṅga kings, whose territories lay in the modern Mysore state, were devoted to Vaiṣṇavism. It is stated that the Gaṅga king Viṣṇugopa was a Vaiṣṇava and "more a saint than a king".<sup>1</sup> The Penukoṇḍa (Anantapur district) copper-plate inscription of the Gaṅga king Mādhava II (III),<sup>2</sup> assigned to the second half of fifth century A.D.,<sup>3</sup> begins with an invocation to the god Padmanābha (Viṣṇu), who is described as resembling the cloudless sky in colour. Evidently Vaiṣṇavism had made tremendous progress in the south by the beginning of the sixth century A.D. Early Cālukya kings also were the worshippers of Viṣṇu. Their records begin with an invocation to the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu; their seals show a figure of the Varāha, so do their coins,<sup>4</sup> and they assumed the title of *Śrī-prthivī-vallabha*. The excellent rock-cut caves at Bādāmi, in the district of Bijapur in Mysore, illustrating elaborate Vaiṣṇavite themes in a dynamic fashion,<sup>5</sup> were sculptured during their rule.

By the middle of the fifth century A.D. Vaiṣṇavism had out-stepped the boundaries of India and spread in the Indian colonies of South-East Asia. The Ci-arutōn (West Java) rock inscription of Pūrṇavarman engraved below the impression of his footprints likens the feet of the king with those of Viṣṇu.<sup>6</sup> The king is described as the lord of Tārumanagara, which must have been somewhere on the bank of the river Ci-tārum. We do not know whether Pūrṇavarman was of Indian origin or an indigenous prince who had adopted an Indian name and culture, but another of his inscription found on the Tugu rock mentions the excavation of a canal Candrabhāgā by, perhaps, his father, and of another, Gomatī, by himself.<sup>7</sup> These canals appear to have been

1. R. Sathianathaier in *The Classical Age*, p. 269.

2. E.L. Rice, EI, XIV, No. 24.

3. Ibid., p. 335; Sircar, op.cit., p. 456.

4. JNSI, XIII, 1951, p. 221; pl. ix. 28.

5. Banerjea, JISOA, XIV, p. 19.

6. EI, XXII, No. 2, line 4.

7. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, pp. 469-70, lines 2 and 4 of the ins.



named after the North-Indian rivers Chenab and Gomati. It may suggest that the Indian culture and religion was carried over to the distant colony of Java by some North-Indian colonisers. Both the inscriptions are placed palaeographically in the middle of the fifth century A.D.<sup>1</sup> In the Malaya Peninsula, a gold ornament depicting Viṣṇu on his *vāhana* Garuḍa was discovered at Selinsing in Perak.<sup>2</sup> A carnelian seal bearing the name of prince Viṣṇuvarman in the fifth century script was unearthed at the same place.<sup>3</sup> Upwards, in the ancient country of Kambuja (modern Combodia) some of the earliest inscriptions discovered, refer to the cult of Viṣṇu. An inscription<sup>4</sup> found at Neak Ta Dambang Dek in the province of Terang in southern Cambodia begins with a eulogy of Viṣṇu, who is described as one, in whom all unite whether they are Yogis or live in misery, who sleeps on the bed formed by the serpent Śeṣa with his expanded hood in the bed-chamber of the milk ocean, in a corner of whose belly all the three worlds find refuge, and from whose navel springs a lotus ; and the deity is invoked to protect Kulaprabhāvatī, the chief queen of king Jayavarman, identified with Jayavarman of Fu-nan who ruled from c. A.D. 475 to 514. The inscription records the installation of an image of a god, apparently, Viṣṇu. Slightly later, the Proasat Pram Loven inscription of Guṇavarman,<sup>5</sup> son of Jayavarman and Kulaprabhāvatī, records the consecration of a footprint of Viṣṇu mentioned under the name Cakratīrthasvāmin. It refers to several names of the deity, Hari, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava and Śrīpati, and specifically mentions the Bhāgavatas,<sup>6</sup> the sectarian worshippers of Viṣṇu. In the second half of the sixth century A.D., the inscriptions of king Rudravarman of Combodia compare him with Viṣṇu Trivikrama in valour.<sup>7</sup> Towards north, in the ancient kingdom of Campā, an inscription of king Bhadravarman,<sup>8</sup> who according to some scholars<sup>9</sup> ruled in the first quarter of the fifth

1. Ibid., p. 468, f.n.1; B.R. Chatterji, *India and Java*, pt. I, p. 2; pt. II, p. 24.

2. R.C. Majumdar; *Vākāṭaka-Gupta Age*, p. 320.

3. Ibid.

4. R.C. Majumdar, *The Inscriptions of Kambuja*, No. 1.

5. Ibid., No. 2; also see R.C. Majumdar, *The Kambuja deśa*, pp. 40-1.

6. R.C. Majumdar, *The Inscriptions of Kambuja*, No. 2, v. 11.

7. C.S. Srinivasachari, *The Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, II. 1928, p. 15.

8. Sircar, op.cit., p. 474f.

9. R.C. Majumdar in *The Classical Age*, pp. 634-5.



century A.D., begins with an invocation to Maheśvara, Umā, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu. However, D.C. Sircar,<sup>1</sup> on the grounds of palaeography, dates it in the fifth-sixth century A.D. It is engraved on a stala found at My-son, in the Quang Nam district of Annam. Thus by the beginning of the sixth century Vaiṣṇavism, along with Indian culture, had spread throughout South-East Asia.

To recapitulate, Vaiṣṇavism in its earlier form Bhāgavatism was prevalent in some portions of Uttara Pradesh, Rājasthān, Madhya Pradesh and Western Deccan in the centuries just before the beginning of the Christian era. It continued to progress in the Śaka-Kuṣāṇa period with its centre at Mathura and became quite popular in the Deccan during the rule of the Sātavāhanas. However, in the Gupta period its popularity was phenomenal when it spread not only throughout the country, in almost each and every state of modern India, but also in the Indian colonies of South-East Asia, in Indo-China, Combodia, Malaya and Indonesia.

1. Sircar, op. cit.



## CONCLUSION

In summing up the results of our investigation we may state that Vaiṣṇavism was a development of Bhāgavatism, the cult of *bhagavat* Nārāyaṇa, which through a process of synthesis and absorption became one of the most influential religions of the Gupta age. The cult of the god Nārāyaṇa is the heritage of a very ancient past, and his history provides an outstanding example of the origin and evolution of the conception of a god developing out of the primitive tribal life and linked inseparably with the social and material conditions of the times. Numerous scholars have attempted<sup>1</sup> till now to explain the origin and significance of the terms 'Nārāyaṇa', '*bhagavat*', '*bhakti*' and 'Pañcarātra'. But they have not been able to get rid of the inhibitions imposed upon their minds by the current meanings of the terms and by their ideological outlook ; hence they could not fathom the real nature of the *pañcarātra sattrā* of Nārāyaṇa and its connection with the later cult of the same name, nor could they offer any explanation for the sudden transition in the meanings of the terms *bhagavat* and *bhakti*. Practices and usages which appeared shocking to later sense of propriety were rationalized as mere symbolism, ignoring the fact that symbolism also arises out of material foundations, and obsolete rites which appear senseless today, justifiable only through far-fetched superficial interpretations, had some real practical value at the time of their origin. But our study shows that the *pañcarātra sattrā* of Nārāyaṇa was nothing but the ritual of human-sacrifice lasting for five days. It originated out of the basic necessity of man to provide for his food and required the collective effort of the whole tribe that is of Nārāyaṇa, and hence it was described as a *sattrā*, a communal

1. Supra, p. 33f.



sacrifice. When cannibalism was abandoned and eventually supplanted by agriculture as a source of subsistence, the ritual came to be linked with the new means of production. In the process Nārāyaṇa who was the *bhagavat* the owner of the communal wealth, came to be associated with agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Similarly *bhakta* was originally a sharer of the communal wealth mainly consisting of food,<sup>2</sup> and as a member of the tribe, which was identical with Nārāyaṇa, he belonged to him and was a part of him. In course of time, the gulf between the all-powerful body of the tribe, and the individual member widened, and now *bhagavat* Nārāyaṇa became a god and a *bhakta* his devotee.<sup>3</sup> With the break-up of tribal society the ties of kinship lost their force, and new relations were established based upon a sense of devotion, subordination and loyalty. The new form of society was reflected in religious thought ; and devotion and faith became the major values of the religions that sprang up after the age of the Buddha.

Through the unconscious but deep influence of environment and utility on the formation of religious beliefs, the doctrines of *bhakti* and *ahimsā*, two cardinal tenets of Vaiṣṇavism, were harmonised with the times and found socially and economically useful. Faith was the basis of a society planned on varṇa organisation, and the importance of non-killing of cattle could not be minimised in a community based on agriculture. The same process can be discerned in Zoroastrianism, which forbade the killing of dogs and bulls, indispensable for cattle-herding and agriculture.

The confrontation of the old and the new appears to have created a division in the form of Nārāyaṇa-worship, and in the early centuries of the Christian era Pañcarātra and Bhāgavatism seem to have emerged as two different sects of the Vaiṣṇavas. The Pañcarātra clung to ancient ritual and practices in some form and spurned the varṇa distinctions keeping up the old tribal spirit in religious matters, but their extant works show that infiltration of brāhmaṇical ideas had begun in the Gupta period with the result that even the earliest of these resort to some kind of gradation in matters relating to the four varṇas. The other form of worship, Bhāgavatism, was dominated by brāhmaṇical ideology and adopted by the ruling classes.

1. Supra, p. 46-7.

2. Supra, p. 38.

3. Supra, p. 110f.



Deriving their origin from the same source, the Pāñcarātra cult and Bhāgavatism diverged through their association with differing social and ritualistic elements. With the identification of the non-vedic Nārāyaṇa with the Vedic Viṣṇu, and the success of brāhmaṇism, Bhāgavatism transformed itself into Vaiṣṇavism, and the Pāñcarātra came to be an esoteric and exclusive sect of the Vaiṣṇavas.

For lack of evidence we are unable to trace the steps leading to the merging of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu into one, but similarity in character and status in the social complex may have been one reason. The use of the name 'Nārāyaṇa' is more frequent in earlier texts, which suggests that he enjoyed greater following than the Vedic god. Gradually, the orthodox Vedic element came to predominate over the composite cult which was now transmuted into Vaiṣṇavism, and the prestige of Nārāyaṇa and the orthodox character of Viṣṇu sanctioned by the Vedas combined to give birth to an authoritarian religion upheld by the priestly and the ruling classes.

The alliance of the worship of Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva with that of Nārāyaṇa was a momentous event in the history of the cult. Saṅkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva were popular divinities in the fourth century B.C. ; Megasthenes and Kauṭilya refer to them. Originally, the two were associate gods of the great tribal goddess Ekānaṁśā, but the transition of the tribal society from matriarchal to patriarchal conditions produced a corresponding change in the importance of the deities it worshipped ; the male gods became more important, and a large mass of heroic tales and legends gathered round them. In the earlier stages, the two gods were on equal footing, for both were regarded as partial manifestations of Nārāyaṇa, the orthodox divinity. But, later, Vāsudeva was completely identified with Nārāyaṇa, and he became his most important human incarnation ; while Saṅkarṣaṇa-Baladeva receded into background becoming his subordinate ally. He came to be looked upon as an incarnation of the serpent, Śeṣa, who formed the bed and support of Nārāyaṇa. Such developments contributed a good deal to the popularisation of Bhāgavatism.

The initiative towards the assimilation of these cults into Bhāgavatism may have been taken as early as the second century B.C. by some progressive priests, to combat Buddhism as Raychaudhuri suggests ; but the real stimulus came from the double threat to the existing social order caused by the influx of foreign hordes and the rise of new economic factors causing an improvement in the condition of the lower varṇas. To restore the social equilibrium and



re-establish the sanctity of the brāhmaṇical way of life, the two popular gods were identified with Nārāyaṇa so that brāhmaṇical precepts of social and moral conduct could reach the masses through their worship. The epics and the Purāṇas provided an excellent means for diffusing the remodelled cults and the brāhmaṇical code, and by recasting these the priests could combine religious and moral instruction with popular entertainment. Thus the great epic is a revised and enlarged version of a popular poem redacted by a group of diaskeuasts who worked according to a precise plan for a set purpose, and we may state that apart from inculcating brāhmaṇical views it presents a constant apologia for Kṛṣṇa's identification with Viṣṇu. Undoubtedly the work, which came to be known as a Dharmaśāstra, played a formidable role in propagating brāhmaṇism, and, in our opinion, the *Mahābhārata* was first promulgated in the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. Similar revisions and additions were made in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Purāṇas also, and by the end of the Gupta period the new religion was well entrenched.

The identification of Nārāyaṇa with Vāsudeva, who was known to have been born among the Vṛṣṇis, gave birth to the theory of incarnation, which was further developed under the influence of the Buddhist doctrine of the Bodhisattvas, and it fostered a hopeful belief in the coming of a saviour. It also served as a highly effective weapon for removing tribal and regional segregation and unifying the entire country in a brāhmaṇical mould. In Greece tribal and political disunity engendered polytheism and made monotheism impossible ; but in India Vaiṣṇavism solved the problem through its doctrine of incarnation by accommodating polytheism within a monotheistic framework and thus served as a powerful integrating force.

But the doctrine also illustrates fully the character of Vaiṣṇavism as it emerged in the Gupta period. Unlike the Buddha who took birth according to the Jātakas even in the families of potters, untouchables, carpenters and ironsmiths, not one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu is supposed to have appeared in a low-ranking family. His human incarnations were either kings or sages of great celebrity; and although the ancestry of some sage-incarnations such as Veda-Vyāsa was of dubious respectability,<sup>1</sup> they were all looked upon

1. Vyāsa, the traditional arranger of the Vedas and the author of the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, is reputed to have been the son of a fisherwoman. However, some texts describe him as a Bhārgava. See Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p. 202.



traditionally as brāhmaṇas. In fact Vaiṣṇavism, as it is preached in the epics and the Purāṇas, completely identifies itself with the brāhmaṇical social system. The *Bhagavadgītā* is remarkably tolerant in religious matters ; but it adopts an extremely rigid attitude towards varṇa duties. Thus on one side it declares that even those who worship other gods with devotion are in reality worshipping the *bhagavat* without knowing so,<sup>1</sup> and that whatever form (*tanum*) a votary worships the godhead makes his faith secure in that very form;<sup>2</sup> on the other side it twice repeats the dictum that it is better to stick to one's varṇa duty, even if one does it badly, than to perform another's in an excellent manner.<sup>3</sup> The work states clearly that even if one's innate duty, which is nothing else than varṇa duty, is wrong or objectionable, one should not abandon it,<sup>4</sup> for the four orders of varṇa were created by the god himself.<sup>5</sup> Thus Vaiṣṇavism as it was promulgated in the early centuries of the Christian era was something which came from above, or perhaps it will be more correct to say that popular cults were transformed into Vaiṣṇavism to maintain the varṇa basis of society.

The ideology of the richer classes is reflected in Vaiṣṇavite rituals also. There are two strata in the rituals. Some are adaptations of earlier and really ancient rites such as the worship of images, offerings of rice and sesamum etc.,<sup>6</sup> others were evolved under the influence of the novel ideas of *bhakti* and *ahimsā*. These newly developed rituals fully exhibit the spirit of the new religion and the ideas of its votaries. The systematic 'acts of worship' or *upacāras* laid down by the texts of the third-fourth centuries A.D. are imbued with the spirit of aristocracy, for the image was attended to in the manner of a lord or patron. We may express our concurrence with Grierson<sup>7</sup> that in the early stages Vaiṣṇavism was a religion of the wealthy.

1. *Bhg.*, IX. 23-4:

2. *Ibid.*, VII. 21.

3. *Śreyāṇsvadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmātsvanuṣṭhitāt.*  
*Ibid.*, III. 35; XVIII. 47.

4. *Ibid.*, XVIII. 48.

5. *Ibid.*, IV. 13.

6. *Supra.*

7. Grierson, *ERE*, II, p. 548. He adds that it was Rāmānanda who made it a religion of the people in the fourteenth century A.D.



None the less, under the patronage of the Guptas Vaiṣṇavism reached the climax of its popularity. The fact that Śrī-Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and plenty, was united with Viṣṇu during this period bears testimony to the growing prestige of the new religion, which spread from one end of the country to another and extended to the Indian colonies of South-East Asia. It enjoyed full support of the rich nobility and traders, merchants and priests, as shown by numerous land-grants ; on the other hand, it also counted amongst its followers, women, agriculturists and craftsmen as indicated by archaeological and literary sources. The religion kept its door open to all the four varṇas, and, with the prestige and authority it derived from the support of the higher classes, it must have influenced deeply the masses also, and was apparently responsible for preserving the varṇa system and reconciling the masses to their social and economic conditions.



## APPENDIX A

### FOOTPRINT OF VIṢṆU

In the Vedic literature Viṣṇu is chiefly extolled for his three strides with which he traversed the world.<sup>1</sup> The feat gave rise to the myth of his dwarf incarnation and the Trivikrama form.<sup>2</sup> The *Mahābhārata* speaks of him as the presiding deity of motion,<sup>3</sup> and a similar statement is made in the *Manu-smṛti*.<sup>4</sup> The *Nāṭya Śāstra* of Bharata applies to him the epithet *amitagata*, one with unrestrained movement,<sup>5</sup> and the earth is often described as having been trodden by Viṣṇu in the past.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising that in the epic-Purāṇa period a few holy spots were supposed to bear the markings of the foot of Viṣṇu, whose one main attribute is his power of striding.

Yāska,<sup>7</sup> explaining the three steps of Viṣṇu mentioned in a Ṛgvedic verse,<sup>8</sup> quoted the opinion of two of his predecessors, Śākapūṇi and Aurnāvābha. According to Śākapūṇi Viṣṇu placed his steps in a three-fold manner, on the earth (as fire), in the atmosphere (as the lightening), and in the sky (as the sun). The view of Aurnāvābha, however, is not so clear and is given as follows:

*samārohaṇe viṣṇupade gayaśirasītyaurnāvābhaḥ*

The passage has been variously interpreted by the scholars. According to Muir<sup>9</sup> it refers to the rise, the culmination and the setting of the sun. Following him, B.M. Barua explained the words *viṣṇupada* and *gayaśiras* as astronomical terms, and translated the opinion of Aurnāvābha as “when (the sun is) on the rising point

1. Gonda, AEV, p. 55f.

2. Supra.

3. *Mbh.*, XIV. 42. 25.

4. *Msm.*, XII. 121.

5. *Nāṭya Śāstra*, GOS ed., III. 50.

6. *Tai. Ār.*, X. 1; *Vi. Pu.*, I. 4. 35.

7. *Nirukta*, XII. 19.

8. *RV*, I. 22. 17.

9. Muir, OST, IV, p. 63f.



(*samārohaṇe*), in his position in the meridian (*viṣṇupade*, in the footpath of Viṣṇu), and in his stand on Gaya's head at the time of setting (*gayaśirasi*)".<sup>1</sup> But according to Jayaswal,<sup>2</sup> Aurnavābha believed that Viṣṇu "literally and physically" in the past had taken the steps in the manner described by Śākapūṇi and in ascending (*samārohaṇe*) he stepped at the *viṣṇupada* on the Gaya Peak. Kane<sup>3</sup> and Sircar<sup>4</sup> offered another rendering. The former wrote "According to Śākapūṇi Viṣṇu plants his foot on the earth, in mid-air and heaven ; according to Aurnavābha on Samārohaṇa, Viṣṇupada and Gayaśiras". Thus according to this view Samārohaṇa, Viṣṇupada and Gayaśiras were the three holy spots in the Gaya region supposed to bear the footprints of Viṣṇu as early as 600 B.C.

The explanation given by Kane and Sircar does not appear convincing to us. Yāska before quoting Śākapūṇi and Aurnavābha tells us "whatever there is, Viṣṇu strides over it". Evidently the three steps of Viṣṇu refer to his stepping over the whole universe and not just three places, all located in the Gaya region. Either Aurnavābha gives us an alternative interpretation of the three steps of Viṣṇu by placing these in the two points of horizon and the zenith or he refers to the place where Viṣṇu is supposed to have planted his first step in ascending, his citation being a further elucidation of Śākapūṇi's view.

Although the late character of the *Gayā-māhātmya* section of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which contains the legend of Gayāsura, whose head Viṣṇu pressed down by his foot and the consequent marking of his foot on a hill in Gaya, is generally acknowledged,<sup>5</sup> stories about a hill bearing the footprints of Viṣṇu may have been current even in the days of Yāska. The antiquity of Gaya and the Gayaśiras or Gayaśīrṣa hill is vouched for by several Buddhist and brāhmanical sources of the pre-Christian era.<sup>6</sup> A prose passage of the *Viṣṇu-smṛti*,<sup>7</sup> represent

1. Barua, *Gaya and Buddha Gaya*, Vol. I, p. 41.

2. Jayaswal, *IA*, 1918, XLVII, p. 84.

3. Kane, *Hist. Dh.*, IV, p. 645f.

4. Sircar, *Geo. Anc. Med. Ind.*, p. 229.

5. Barua dates it not earlier than the thirteenth century A.D., see *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 64, but Kane assigns it to some time between the seventh and the tenth centuries A.D., *op. cit.*, p. 652.

6. Sircar, *op. cit.*, p. 225f.

7. *Viṣṇu-smṛti*, chap. 85.



ting its oldest stratum, speaks of several holy spots of Gaya, Gayaśīrṣa, Akṣayavaṭa and Phalgu-tīrtha. A Viṣṇupada is also mentioned along with Godāvarī, Gomatī, Vipāśā and several other sacred spots of the north and south. As the list contains the names of places suitable for the performance of Śrāddha, the reference in question may relate to Viṣṇupada in Gaya. The *Tirthayātrā* section of the *Vana Parva*<sup>1</sup> refers to *savitṛ-padam* at Gaya. It is suggested that Viṣṇu is described here as Savitr, the sun-god.<sup>2</sup> A seal found at Basār<sup>3</sup> bearing the legend *Śrī-Viṣṇupadasvāmi-nārāyaṇaḥ* (Nārāyaṇa, the lord of the illustrious Viṣṇupada) in early Gupta characters may signify, as Bloch contended, that a Viṣṇupada temple at Gaya existed in the fourth century A.D. Although the seal does not give any indication of the place of its origin, the proximity of Gaya to Vaiśalī makes it highly probable that it came from there. The present temple of Viṣṇupada is not of an early date, but some earlier structure may have existed in its place in the Gupta period.

Nevertheless, the epics refer to a Viṣṇupada situated in the north. The *Mahābhārata*<sup>4</sup> contains six references to it, three of which speak of it as a spot on the top of a northern hill. In the *tīrthayātrā* section of the *Vana-Parva*<sup>5</sup> Viṣṇupada is placed in the Vāmanaka tīrtha, which incidentally substantiates the connection between the worship of the footprints of Viṣṇu and his dwarf incarnation. The *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>6</sup> locates Viṣṇupada in Vālhīka, which is a mistake for Vāhīka, a country on the river Vipāśā which later comes to designate the whole of Pañcanada.<sup>7</sup> The Meharauli iron pillar inscription<sup>8</sup> of king Candraraja mentions a Viṣṇupadagiri. Although at present we cannot determine its exact location, it appears to have been in the north.

The available pieces of literary evidence generally place the footprints of Viṣṇu on a hill or hills. It appears that some natural crevices in the rocks, which were originally fetishistic objects of worship, were later recognised by the Vaiṣṇava priests as the impressions

1. *Mbh.*, III. 82. 81.

2. Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 649.

3. ASIAR, 1903-04, pp. 110-11., seal no., 31.

4. *Mbh.*, III. 81.87; 130.8; V. 109.19; VII. 57. 32; XII. 29. 31; (vul.) XIII. 126-39.

5. *Mbh.*, III. 83. 103-4.

6. *Rāmā.*, II. 68. 19.

7. Sircar., *op. cit.*, p. 185f.

8. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 277, line 6 of the ins.



of their deity's foot and linked with his dwarf incarnation. Cases of such adoption are not wanting. The Śrīpāda on the Sumana or Adam's Peak in Ceylon, which is a hollow five feet long, is regarded by the Śaivas as the footprint of Śiva, by the Mohammedans as of Adam, and by the Buddhists as of their Lord, the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> A passage of the *Mahābhārata* states that the feet of Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu were worshipped by the śūdras.<sup>2</sup> The aniconic and fetishistic worship, originally, might have been more popular among the lower classes of society.

However, some of the epigraphs of the Gupta period indicate that apart from the worship of Viṣṇu's so-called footprints on the hills, the carving of his footmarks was also in vogue, and these were embodied in shrines and temples. The Rithpur copper plate inscription<sup>3</sup> of Prabhāvatī-guptā records an order issued by the queen from the foot of (the deity) Rāmagirisvāmin (*rāmagirisvāminah pādamūlāt*). In the *Meghadūta*, Kālidāsa pays homage to the hills of Rāmagiri (modern Ramtek near Nagpur), which are described as marked with the footprints of Raghupati.<sup>4</sup> An earlier inscription of the same queen informs us that the queen made a gift to a brāhmaṇa Canāla-svāmin after offering it first to the foot of the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Another Vākāṭaka inscription records the gift of some land by one Nārāyaṇarāja for the maintenance of a charitable hall in honour of the footprint (*pādamūla*) of Mahāpuruṣa. The deity has been identified with Viṣṇu.<sup>6</sup> We do not know whether these references relate to shrines containing artificially carved footprints of Viṣṇu or to natural hollows found on rocks and associated with Vaiṣṇavite gods by popular mythology, but an inscription of A.D. 423 discovered at Nagari speaks of the erection of a shrine for the footprints of Mahāpuruṣa, *i.e.*, Viṣṇu by three bania brothers.<sup>7</sup> The Poḍāgaḍh inscription of the time of Nala king Skandavarman of the fifth century A.D. records the establishment of a *pādamūla* of Viṣṇu.<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes contended that the word *pādamūla* is figuratively used

1. Kern, *The Manual of Indian Buddhism*, p. 97.

2. *pādaśūdra bhajante me. Mbh.*, III. 187. 13.

3. Sircar, *Sel. Ins.*, p. 415f.

4. *Meghadūta*, v. 12, see Mirashi EI, XXIV, p. 12, f.n.

5. *bhagavatpādamūle nivedya. EI*, XV, No. 4, line 14.

6. Mirashi, EI, XXIII. No. 14.

7. Bhandarkar's List, EI, XIX Append. p. 2. ; MASI, No. 4, p. 120-1.

8. EI, XXI, No. 24, line 5.



in these inscriptions to denote a sanctuary and not a footprint;<sup>1</sup> but the clear testimony of an inscription<sup>2</sup> of the Kambuja king Guṇavarman completely eliminates any such doubt. The record, palaeographically assigned to the fifth century A.D., expressly mentions the affixing of a *pādamūla* or footprint in the earth<sup>3</sup> of the lord Cakratīrthasvāmin who is described as Hari, Nārāyaṇa and Mādhava and is no other than Viṣṇu. A rock inscription at Ci Aruton in Java, engraved below the footprints of king Pūrṇavarman of the fifth century A.D., compares the feet of the king with those of Viṣṇu.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the imprints of the king's toes had lotus marks. According to a passage<sup>5</sup> of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the footsteps of the bhagavat are marked with flagstaff (*dhvaja*), lotus (*abja*), diamond (*vajra*), goad (*aṅkuśa*) and barley (*yava*).

In the opinion of some scholars the worship of Viṣṇu's foot-impressions was a borrowing from Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> This is, however, refuted by some scholars,<sup>7</sup> who link its origin with the idea of Viṣṇu's three paces. In our opinion, the worship of natural hollows and fetishes in the rocks or hills came to be related with the three steps of Viṣṇu, but the practice of dedicating the footprints of Viṣṇu and of erecting shrines over them became popular certainly due to the Buddhist influence. We have a number of Buddhist inscriptions<sup>8</sup> of the early centuries of Christian era recording the gift of the footprints. Among Bengali Hindus there is a custom of preserving the impressions of the feet of a dead ancestor on a piece of cloth or paper which is an object of veneration by his descendants.<sup>9</sup> In Buddhism, the practice might have originated because of some such notion. It was later adopted by Vaiṣṇavism in which Viṣṇu's foot was already much exalted.<sup>10</sup> However, it could not have been very popular among the Vaiṣṇavas, as is indicated by the dearth of available evidence. None of the numerous existing texts of the Gupta period dealing

1. K.N. Dikshit, EI, XXI, p. 156.

2. Majumdar, *Ins. Kambuja*, No. 2.

3. *sthāpitam bhagavato bhuvi pādamūlam*. *ibid.*, v. 8.

4. EI, XXII, No. 2. line 4.

5. *Vi. Pu.*, V. 13. 32.

6. R.L. Mitra, *Buddha Gaya*, p. 122; R.C. Temple. ERE, V, p. 9046.

7. Barua, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 64; D.C. Sircar, *Cul. Her. Ind.*, IV, p. 130; V.M. Apte, AIU, p. 450.

8. EI, X, Luder's List, Nos. 1209, 1217, 1219 etc.

9. Jayaswal, EI, XXII, p. 5; Barua, *op. cit.*, Vol. II p. 64.

10. Bhāsa, *Dūtāvākya*, i.



with iconometry and other religious matters refer to it ; on the other hand, it is expressly stated in a Vaiṣṇavite work<sup>1</sup> that Viṣṇu should be worshipped only in images made of him in the form of a man. Occasional dedications continued perhaps even in the mediaeval period. Buchanan draws attention to an inscription of uncertain date lying in the court of Viṣṇupada temple at Gaya marking the dedication of the footprints of the deity Dattātreya (a form of Viṣṇu) by Jayasiṃha, a petty king of Kāśmīra.<sup>2</sup>

1. *Parama Samhitā*, III. 5-6.

2. *Patna Gaya Report*, Vol. I, p. 112.







# 提婆菩薩釋楞伽經中外道小乘涅槃論

提婆菩薩造 後魏北印度三藏菩提流支譯

## 節錄：

問曰：何等外道說見自在天造作衆生名涅槃？

答曰：第十二外道，摩陀羅論師言：那羅延論師說：我造一切物，我於一切衆生中最勝。我生一切世間有命無命物。我是一切山中大須彌山王。我是一切水中海。我是一切藥中穀。我是一切仙人中迦毘羅牟尼。若人至心以水草花果供養我，我不失彼人，彼人不失我。摩陀羅論師說：那羅延論師言：一切物從<sup>我</sup>作生，還沒彼處，名為涅槃。是故名常，是涅槃因。

上文錄自大正新<sup>12</sup>大藏經第三十五卷一五七頁



## APPENDIX B

### AN EXTRACT FROM THE CHINESE TRIPITAKA

The Chinese extract<sup>1</sup> is from the work entitled “*Deva-Bodhisattva (Āryadeva)-Śāstra* on the Explanation of Nirvāṇa by Heretical and Hinayāna Masters mentioned in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*” placed under the Abhidharma section of the Chinese Tripitaka. A rough English translation of the passage made by Tan Yun-Shan is as follows :

“Question : Which one of the twenty heretics said that īśvara Deva appeared and created all living beings and is called Nirvāṇa ?

“Answer : The 12th heretic Master Māṭhara said that it was in the words of Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī thus mentioned : ‘I created all things. I am the supreme among all living beings. I gave birth to all living beings and produce all non-living things in all worlds. I am the king mountain Mahā Sumeru among all Mountains. I am the great sea of all rivers. I am the grain of all medicines. I am the Kapila Muni of all Ṛṣis (genii). If a man offers me wholeheartedly water, herbs, flowers and fruits, I will not miss him and he will not miss me. ‘Master Māṭhara said that in the words of Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī it was mentioned thus : ‘All things were produced from my creation and will return to where they came, called Nirvāṇa.’”

In our opinion, the passage unmistakably refers to some verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* and represents a free version of the declarations made by the *bhagavat*, especially in Chapters IX and X of the work. We may compare the following :

*aham kṛtsnasya jagataḥ  
prabhavaḥ pralayastathā.*

(Bhg. VII. 6)

‘I am the origin of the Universe and also its dissolution.’

*pattraṃ puṣpaṃ phalaṃ toyam  
yo me bhaktyā prayacchati.  
tad aham bhaktyupahṛtaṃ  
aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ.*

(Ibid., IX. 26)

“If any earnest should make offering to me with devotion, of leaf or flower or fruit or water, that offering of devotion I enjoy.”

1. *The Chinese Tripitaka*. Vol. XXXII, No. 1640, Taisho ed., pp. 156-8.



*sarasāmasmi sāgarah*

(Ibid., X. 24)

‘Of waters I am the ocean.’

*yajñānām japayajño’smi  
sthāvarāṇām himālayah.*

(Ibid., 25)

“Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of muttered prayer; of things unmoved Himālaya ;”

*aśvatthaḥ sarvavrkṣāṇām  
...siddhānām kapilo munih*

(Ibid., 26)

“Of all trees I am the sacred Fig-tree ;...of the perfected, Kapila the saint.”

*srotasāmasmi jāhnavī*

(Ibid., 31)

‘Of rivers I am Jāhnavī.’

*sargāṇāmādirantaśca  
madhvam caivāham*

(Ibid., 32)

“Of creations I am the Beginning and the End, and the Middle too.”

*viṣṭabhyāhamidaṁ kṛtsnam  
ekāṁśena sthito jagat.*

(Ibid., 42)

“I with one part of myself have established this whole universe, and so abide.”

*yathā nadīnām bahavombuvegāḥ  
samudramevābhimukhā dravanti  
tathā tavāmī naralokavīrā  
viśanti vaktrāṇyabhivijvalanti.*

(Ibid., XI, 28)

“As many river torrents flow to meet the sea, so do these heroes of the world of men enter thy mouths.”

*matkarmakṛnmatparamo  
madbhaktaḥ saṅgavarjitah  
nirvairah sarvabhūteṣu  
yah sa māmēti pāṇḍava.*

(Ibid., 55)

“Whose work is unto me whose goal I am, my votary, free from attachment, void of enmity to any being—he comes to me, O son of Pāṇḍu.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Chinese passage establishes two things quite clearly. Firstly, the *Bhagavadgītā* must have been a well known scripture of the Bhāgavatas in the second century A.D. when Māṭhara, the minister of Kaniṣka II is supposed to have lived<sup>2</sup>; and secondly Māṭhara is said to have attributed these sayings to Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī, apparently the god Nārāyaṇa, hence the *bhagavat* of the *Gītā* was none else but Nārāyaṇa.

Incidentally this is the earliest clear reference to the *Bhagavadgītā*.

1. English translation of the verses is quoted from W.D.P. Hill's translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, London, 1928.

2. Supra, p. 14-5.



## APPENDIX C

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE 89 PROPER NAMES OCCURRING IN AN INSCRIPTION OF THE G.E. 120

A classification of the names mentioned in the Sultanpur copper-plate inscription<sup>1</sup> of G.E. 120 indicating cult-affinities.

Names indicating Vaiṣṇavite influence :

Kṛṣṇadāsa, Rāmaśarmā, Harisiṅha, Yaśoviṣṇu, Kumāraviṣṇu\*, Kṛṣṇamitra, Śrīnātha, Hariśarmma, Hari, Kṛṣṇadatta, Soma-  
viṣṇu, Jayaviṣṇu, Nārāyaṇadāsa, Guhaviṣṇu\*, Yaśoviṣṇu, Śrīguhaviṣṇu\*, Rāmasvāmī, Acyutabhadra, Acyuta, Naradeva,  
Gopāla, Acyutadāsa. Total 22.

Names indicating Śaivite influence :

Rudradāsa, Śambhudatta, Siṃhanandī, Umāyaśā, Vailinandī(?), Śivakunḍa, Vasuśiva, Aparāśiva, Dāmarudra, Īsvaracandra,  
Rudra, Bhavanātha, Bhavadatta, Uma..., Śarvva, Bhava,  
Bhavarakṣita. Total 17.

Names indicating influence of the cult of Kārttikeya :

Kumāradeva, Kumārabhava, Kumārabhūti, Kumāra,  
Mahāsenabhaṭṭa, Guha, Mahāsenadatta. Total 7.

Miscellaneous :

Bhīma (*kulika*-artisan), Prabhucandra, Devadatta, Lakṣmaṇa,  
Kāntideva, Yaśodāma, Gaṇḍo, Prajāpati, Jyeṣṭhadāma,  
Svāmicandra, Yaśogupta, Prabhumitra, Maghaśarmma, Gupta-  
śarmma, Suśarmma, Alātasvāmi, Brahmasvāmi, Śaṣṭhirā(ma),  
Gu...(sa)mma, Unṭaśarmma, Nandodama, Ahiśarmma,  
Lakṣmanaśarmma, Dhaivvaka, Śukkraśarmma, Purandara,  
Siṃhatta (Siṃha-datta ?), Bonda, Vīranāga, Rājyanāga, Mahi,  
Taṇka (Takka ?), Kuladāma, Kāmakunḍa, Ratibhadra,  
Loḍhaka, Prabhakīrtti, Ka..., Piccakunḍa, Pravatrakunḍa,  
Devabhaṭṭa, Amaradatta. Total 42.

Grand Total 88.

Names marked with an asterisk suggest joint-worship of Viṣṇu and Kārttikeya.

1. EI, XXXI, No. 9.



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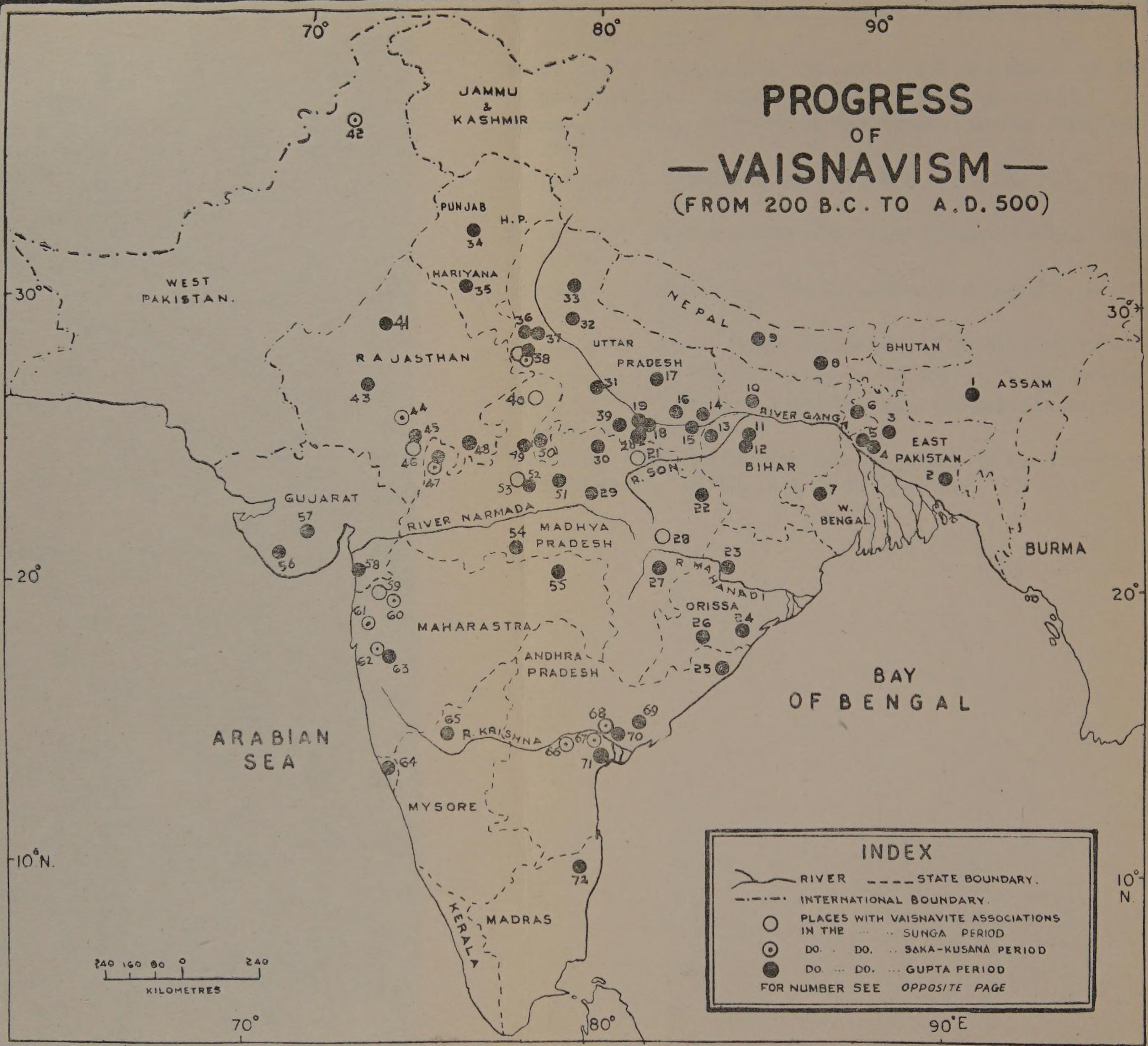
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# PROGRESS OF — VAISNAVISM — (FROM 200 B.C. TO A.D. 500)



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RIVER

STATE BOUNDARY.

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY.

PLACES WITH VAISNAVITE ASSOCIATIONS IN THE ... SUNGA PERIOD

DO. DO. ... SAKA-KUSANA PERIOD

DO. DO. ... GUPTA PERIOD

FOR NUMBER SEE OPPOSITE PAGE



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The map shows places and findspots where sculptures, monuments, coins seals and inscriptions indicative of Vaiṣṇavite influence have been discovered. From this it should not be construed that Vaiṣṇavism was confined to these places only, for the area of influence must have been wider.







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13 f.n.1.	p. 235	p. 170
15 f.n.6.	p. 174	p. 125
36 line 29.	<i>virāṭarūpa</i>	<i>virāḍrupa</i>
37 line 13.	<i>Nārāyaṇīyāgītā</i>	<i>Nārāyaṇīyagītā</i>
38 f.n. 4.	<i>agni-bhaktini</i>	<i>agni-bhaktīni</i>
40 line 15	applications	appellations
47 line 7.	Harrappa	Harappa
57 line 1.	<i>sankarṣaṇa-vāsudevabhyām</i>	<i>sankarṣaṇa-vāsudevābhyām</i>
60 line 30	thus	this
62 line 1.	sect	sept
73 line 16	originally	undoubtedly
111 line 12	eimplying	implying
115 line 18	adopted	adapted
125 line 4	century	centuries
136 line 17	narrower senses	narrower sense
138 line 25	Lakṣamaṇa	Lakṣmaṇa
167 line 18-19	Yaśodharmana	Yaśodharman



















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